



The Open Think
Tank Directory

Think Tank State of the Sector

2020–2021

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1

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The Open Think Tank Directory

The [Open Think Tank Directory](#) (OTTD) was born to overcome the shortage of publicly available information about think tanks and other policy research centres and expertise bodies worldwide. [On Think Tanks](#) has been working on it since 2016, with the objective of developing a tool that benefits the entire evidence-informed-policy community.

The directory currently features information from think tanks all over the world (name, website, brief description, the topics they focus on, contact details, business model, founders' names, current leaders, staff numbers, social media channels and followers, publication numbers, turnover¹ and more).² It is important to highlight that the OTTD does not make any evaluations, assessments or judgements of the organisations it features; it merely provides information about them, in a transparent manner, with the objective of providing a public (and freely accessible) database of think tanks.

The State of the Sector report

Drawing on data from the [Open Think Tank Directory](#), the State of the Sector report offers the evidence-informed-policy community data and analysis on think tanks, and aims to describe the think tank sector worldwide. The 2020–2021 edition is the second think tank State of the Sector report and draws on data from 3,107 think tanks³ worldwide.⁴ This year, the global report is accompanied by four regional briefs⁵ that go deeper into the regional data and offer a more nuanced view of the different think tank contexts, and a think tank survey report that shares how think tanks see the current context, the key challenges faced and the main issues to address.

The data featured in the OTTD depends on the information that organisations provide about themselves (either on their websites or directly provided by them to the directory), and there are variations between organisations; some offer little more than a short description, while others display and share great detail. Given this we do not claim to have gathered all the data on think tanks across the world, but we do believe we have a good representation of the sector worldwide.

¹ Some variables have longitudinal data since 2016.

² The full list of variables [can be seen here](#).

³ 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.

⁴ Click [here for the database](#) used for the analysis and report.

⁵ One for Europe, one for Asia, one for the Americas and one for Africa. We have not produced a regional brief for Oceania as the number of organisations for the region is small (86).

This, and the companion reports produced, presents an interesting (sample level) overview of the sector and gives useful indications of existing trends.

This report explores the number of think tanks across regions, the topics think tanks are focusing on, how much they are publishing, the average age, size and turnover of think tanks, the most common business models, what their leadership looks like and how these variables interact with each other. Additionally, and using the longitudinal data that the OTTD offers, where possible we also offer an analysis of what has changed from 2019 to 2021. In this executive summary we offer the key trends and highlights found in the analysis, but we invite readers to explore the report in depth and also to download the database and access the [Open Think Tank Directory](#) to keep exploring further.

Region highlights

Of the 3,107 think tanks included in the database, most are from West & Northern Europe (22%), followed by USA & Canada (17%), Latin America & the Caribbean (14%) South & Eastern Europe (11%), Eastern Asia (11%), South & South-Eastern Asia (8%), Africa (7%), West & Central Asia (6%) and Oceania (3%). Based on our knowledge of the sector and comparison with other think tanks lists, there is a higher-than-expected representation of think tanks in Latin America & the Caribbean, and a lower representation of Eastern Asia, and USA & Canada. Nevertheless, the database and the results do offer interesting results and comparisons.

The average number of think tanks per country is 21. But there is great variability within regions (and countries) and some show a higher concentration of think tanks than others. The think tank sector is biggest in countries in USA & Canada, West & Northern Europe and Eastern Asia (taking into account both the total number of organisations and the average number per country). The top five countries with the highest number of think tanks included in the database are the United States (452 organisations, 15% of the database), China (188, 6%), Germany (184, 6%), United Kingdom (150, 5%) and France (99, 3%). We found that the higher the GDP of a country, the higher the number of think tanks it hosts.

Topic of focus highlights

The topics that most think tanks in the database focus on are social policy, trade/economics/finance, governance/transparency and environment/natural resources/energy. Most think tanks focus on a couple of key topics of, rather than being generalists. Across regions the main focus is kept on the same key issues, but differences do emerge. To name a few: food/agriculture was a key research area in Africa, international affairs/development in West & Central Asia, law/justice/human rights in Latin America & the Caribbean, and trade/economics/finance is more predominant in Eastern Asia than in other regions.

Date founded highlights

The global average age for think tanks in 2021 was 30 years. There has been a steady increase in the number of think tanks founded by year, and the average peak is around the 2000s. The last decade has seen a slow decline in the number of think tanks founded across all regions. Think tanks in USA & Canada are the oldest on average (37) and reached their peak in the 1980s. South & Eastern Europe (26), West & Central Asia (23) and Africa (22) are the youngest on average.

Gender of founder highlights

Think tanks are predominantly male founded: 55% of organisations in the directory were founded only by men, 15% by both male and female co-founders, 5% by women only and 24% were founded by other entities (e.g. governments, universities, companies, religious orders, international organisations, etc.). The percentage of all-male-founded think tanks has slowly decreased year by year, giving way slightly to all-female-founded think tanks, but mostly to male and female co-founded think tanks. Regardless of this, even in the 2010–2019 decade almost 50% of think tanks were founded by only men.

There is some variability between regions: for example, Eastern Asia has a lower average of think tanks founded by all male (28%), all female (2%) and both female and male founders (5%), and a remarkably high average of think tanks founded by entities (65%). Additionally Latin America & the Caribbean has the highest percentage of think tanks with both male and female founders (31%), followed by South & Eastern Europe (23%) and Africa (21%). These three regions also have a younger think tank sector, so this higher percentage of females in founding members could be due to the increasing participation of women in the political and private sector. But nonetheless there is still a long way ahead, and even in those think tanks founded between 2010 and 2019, 47% were founded by only men (across the world).

Business model highlights

The majority of think tanks in the Open Think Tank Directory are non-profit organisations (67%), followed by university institutes/centres (16%), government organisations (8%), for-profit organisations (5%) and a small group of other types (4%). And this trend is almost the same across the world, except in Eastern Asia (and China in particular) which has the highest percentage of government think tanks (41%).

Publications highlights

Most think tanks in the database with publications number data have published up to 10 pieces of written work in 2020 (38%), and 33% had 11 to 150 publications. Only 8% of think tanks published more than 150 pieces, and 7% did not publish anything in 2020. Think tanks in Eastern Asia, USA & Canada and West & Northern Europe publish more than their counterparts in other regions.

As expected, organisations with a higher staff number publish more than those with a smaller staff. An interesting, but alarming finding is that organisations founded by only women, and those led by women, have a lower publication count than those founded and/or led by men, and they are also observed to be smaller in terms of staff numbers and have less turnover (which could be affecting their smaller publication numbers).

Turnover highlights

Turnover is the variable with the least amount of data available (data is held for only 263 organisations, 8% of the organisations included in this report). This is mainly because most organisations do not show or share their turnover information in an accessible fashion. In terms of regional differences Eastern Asia and USA & Canada have the majority of think tanks with a turnover of over USD 10 million, while the majority of think tanks in Africa and South & Eastern Europe have a turnover of less than USD 500,000.

Organisations founded by men (as well as other entities) have a higher turnover than those with women as founding members. This is a trend that we also saw in the 2019 report.

The average turnover change from 2019 to 2020 of the 193 organisations for which we have turnover data for both years is an increase of 3.85%, but there is great variability by organisation size; most of the organisations with a turnover of less than USD 1.5 million (56%), and those with USD 100 million and more showed a decrease in turnover. On the other hand, most think tanks with a turnover of over USD 1.5 million but less than USD 100 million indicated an increase.

Staff highlights

The median staff number in 2021 is 18 (down from 19 in 2019) and on average 47% of staff are women. The region with the highest median is Eastern Asia, but this number is led by China and the government organisations within it that make up the sample.

There is a tendency for older organisations, and those male-led or male-founded, to have more staff; also, think tanks founded by entities have the highest average and median staff size.

A comparison of staff size numbers from 2019 to 2021 shows that:

- A third of organisations decreased in staff size, but 47% increased.
- The median change tends to be lower in 2021 for Africa, Latin America & the Caribbean, South & Eastern Europe, West & Central Asia and West & Northern Europe.
- On average, government think tanks showed less change in staff size compared to other business models.
- The gender of the think tank leader did not make a significant difference in terms of staff size changes.

Gender and leadership highlights

In 2021 think tanks continue to be male led: 72% of think tanks in the database are led by men, 26% by women and a small number of think tanks (3%) are led by both men and women. Across regions think tanks also continue to be male led, but with some differences. This trend is more prominent in Eastern Asia where the percentage of female-led think tanks is substantially lower than average (9%) and the percentage of male-led organisations is the highest (89%). Conversely Latin America & the Caribbean (34%), South & Eastern Europe (30%) and USA & Canada (29%) have the highest percentage of female leaders, but we are still far away from equality.

Social media highlights

The social media channels that feature most prominently in the directory are Facebook (75% of organisations have an account registered) and Twitter (72%), followed by YouTube (46%), LinkedIn (46%) and Instagram (27%). There is little social media data registered for Eastern Asia because the channels that the directory registers are either not the most popular in the region, or are limited or banned by governments (as are Facebook and Twitter in China).

As we continue to update the Open Think Tank Directory, we will continue to produce yearly State of the Sector reports. We hope that this report provides a rich and useful overview of the sector across the world, and we invite you to explore the data and share your perspective and insights on the trends.

2

The Open Think Tank Directory

The Open Think Tank Directory

The [Open Think Tank Directory](#) was born to overcome the shortage of publicly available information about think tanks, and other policy research centres and expertise bodies worldwide. [On Think Tanks](#) began working on it in 2016 with the objective of developing a tool that would benefit the entire evidence-informed-policy community. Through it, centres can identify potential collaborators and connect with peers, funders and other stakeholders; for the growing 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. Additionally, the public and open nature of the database ([downloadable through this link](#)) helps increase the sector's transparency.

The directory currently features public information (or information that should be public) on 3,537 organisations⁶ from around the world. It registers information on more than 100 variables for each organisation, including name, website, brief description, the topics they focus on, contact details, business model, founders' names, current leaders, staff numbers, social media channels and followers, publication numbers, turnover⁷ and more (a full list of variables can be seen [here](#)).

Defining which organisations are to be included in the Open Think Tank Directory is a difficult task, as think tanks themselves are difficult to define. Organisations labelled as think tanks include for-profit consultancies, university-based research centres, non-governmental organisations, public policy bodies, foundations, advocacy organisations and membership-based associations, to name a few. But despite their differences – and for 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 research, aiming to influence the public agenda, monitoring how specific policies are carried out, suggesting, or advocating for, policy changes and so on.

⁶ This number includes boundary organisations (not included in the analysis). See [FAQs](#) for more on inclusion criteria.

⁷ Some variables have longitudinal data since 2016.

Given this definition, the inclusion criteria for the directory is broad:

- The organisation must carry out some form of research with the aims of informing public policies and debate.
- The organisation must have an independent identity.
- The organisation needs to be formally registered in a country.

The directory has been compiled and is updated using a mixed approach: web searches in Google to find existing think tanks lists and organisations; suggestions of inclusion by country and regional experts; and direct submission by think tanks. All organisations are reviewed to verify that they fit the inclusion criteria and are either accepted, accepted but deemed ‘boundary’ or not accepted. Information is retrieved from think tanks’ websites and in some cases is submitted by organisations themselves. 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.

3

Introduction

Introduction

Overview

Drawing on data from 3,107 think tanks⁸ worldwide registered on the [Open Think Tank Directory](#), the State of the Sector report offers the evidence-informed-policy community data and analysis on think tanks. The report is based on an analysis of 2020 and 2021 data from 3,107 active think tanks,⁹ and it aims to describe (but not explain) the think tank sector worldwide. It explores: the number of think tanks across regions, topics think tanks are focusing on, how much they are publishing, the average age, size and turnover of think tanks, the most common business models, and what their leadership looks like.

The 2020–2021 publication is the second think tank State of the Sector report. This year we have accompanied the global report with four regional briefs that go deeper into the regional data and offer a more nuanced view of the different think tank contexts, as well as a think tank survey report which shares how think tanks see the current context, the key challenges faced and the key issues to address.

The 2020–2021 report follows a similar structure to its predecessor but has some changes: the focus is on the data from the year of publication,¹⁰ and it highlights what has changed from the 2019 data. Additionally, and as part of our efforts to provide a comprehensive list of think tanks,¹¹ the database grew with the efforts we made to register new think tanks from the regions that we found underrepresented in the previous report.

There are many ways to explore the data available in the OTTD; for continuity and comparability we have kept the structure of the 2019 report and have used regions as the key comparison variable, but also offer comparisons based on business models, date of foundation, gender of leader and gender of founders. We aim to give a nuanced view, and hope this inspires others to explore the data further.

We hope that this report provides a rich and useful overview of the sector across the world. As we continue to update the database we will continue to produce yearly State of the Sector reports.

We invite you to explore the data and share your perspective and insights on the trends.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Click [here for the database](#) used for the analysis and report.

¹⁰ Except for turnover and publication numbers.

¹¹ 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.

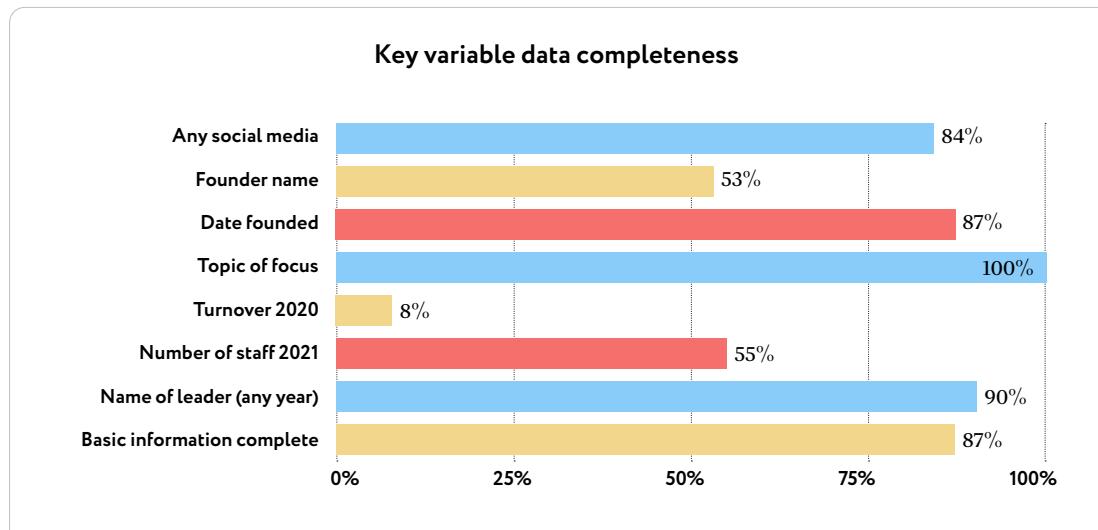
Data quality

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 OTTD holds. This, and the companion reports produced, presents an interesting overview of the sector and gives useful indications of existing trends.

The data featured in the OTTD depends on the information that organisations offer on their websites, and in some cases what they themselves have offered to the directory. The information that think tanks offer on their websites varies greatly;¹² some offer little more than a short description, while others display great detail. All think tanks aim to show on their websites what they do and how, but not all do so thoroughly or even clearly, and in many cases information is missing (e.g. who founded the organisation, staff profiles, contact information, etc.) Because of this, sourcing and completing data for each organisation is difficult and the data completeness by variables is wide-ranging.

Chart 1 shows the overall data completeness. As in the 2019 report, turnover information is the variable with the least data available. Few think tanks share this information on their website, and not all share it when directly asked about it (only 35% of those that answered our direct consultation shared turnover data).

Chart 1.



n: Basic information is: name in original language, name in English, website, description, city, country, address, general contact email, operating language(s), topics and date founded.

¹² 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”](#).

As in the 2019 edition, there is also wide variability between regions as think tanks in some regions tend to share more information about themselves than others. For example, countries in Latin America & the Caribbean, and Asia (all subregions) share less data about their staff and leaders than organisations in USA & Canada, West & Northern Europe and Oceania. Social media information is something that think tanks in most regions share uniformly: more than 84% of think tanks share this data across all subregions except Eastern Asia (36%), but this is most certainly due to the type of social media accounts that we register: (e.g., Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook etc.), which are not widely used in China (the country with most think tanks in our Eastern Asia subregion). The amount of data available will frame and guide the analysis that we can make by variables, as well as what we can interpret or not from the data. In each chart shared we will outline the number of think tanks included in that analysis so you can read the results with care.

4

Region

Questions answered in this chapter:

- How many organisations are there per region?
- What is the average and median number of think tanks per country?
- Which countries feature more think tanks in the directory?

Region

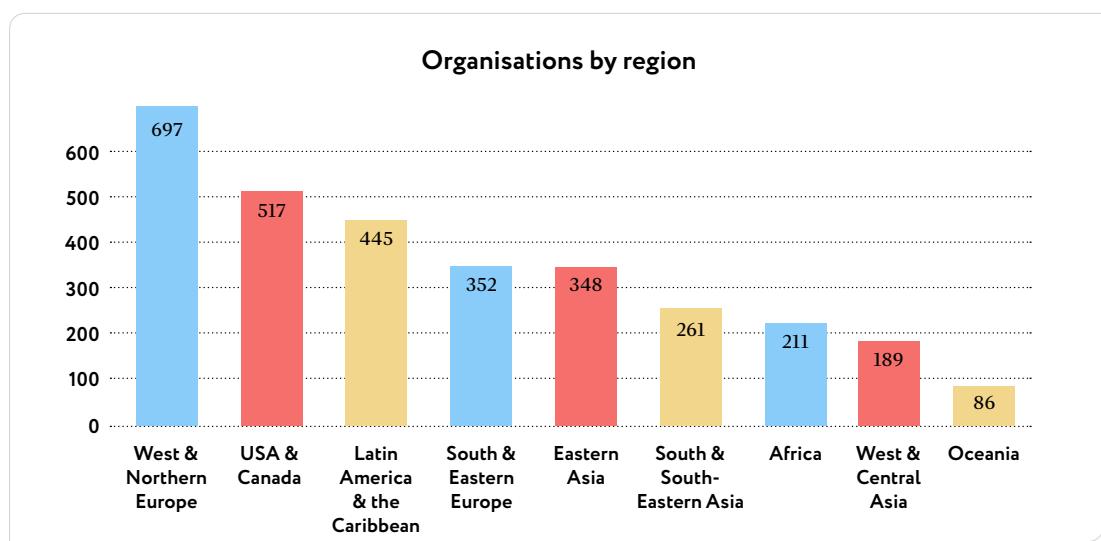
How many organisations are there per region?

To provide a nuanced overview of geographical differences (and bearing in mind think tank numbers) we opted for comparison based on regional groups. These have been defined using a mixed approach based on continent, UN subregional divisions and the number of think tanks in each. The resulting regional grouping (henceforth called ‘region’) is shown in Chart 2 and enabled us to compare different contexts without atomising the data excessively.

Of the 3,107 think tanks included in the database, most are from West & Northern Europe (697 organisations, 22%), USA & Canada (517, 17%) and Latin America & the Caribbean (445, 14%). West & Northern Europe is still the region with the greatest number of think tanks in the database, and USA & Canada has increased in number because of a focus on this region in the data collection phase. Following these three regions are South & Eastern Europe (352, 11%), Eastern Asia (348, 11%), South & South-Eastern Asia (261, 8%), Africa (211, 7%), West & Central Asia (189, 6%) and Oceania (86, 3%). When compared with last year’s figures, the number of think tanks in the database for all regions has increased except for Oceania.

Based on our knowledge of the sector and comparison with other think tank lists, there is still a higher-than-expected representation of think tanks in Latin America & the Caribbean, and a lower representation of Eastern Asia and USA & Canada (which despite being more adequately represented this year still do not match what is expected from the sector). Nevertheless, the database and the results do offer interesting results and comparisons and we will continue to improve the database each year.

Image 1: Organisations per region



How many think tanks are there per country?

The average number of think tanks per country is 21 (up from 19 in the previous report, which does not imply an increase in the sector but an improved mapping of think tanks by the database). But there is great country variability, evidenced by the widely different numbers shown by region (Table 1). For example, USA & Canada has the highest average number of think tanks in the database (259¹³), which is over four times more than the region with the second highest average number – Eastern Asia (58).

Table 1.

Average number of think tanks per country by region	
Region	Average # of TT per country
Africa	7
Latin America & the Caribbean	18
USA & Canada	259
Eastern Asia	58
South & South-Eastern Asia	15
West & Central Asia	8
South & Eastern Europe	15
West & Northern Europe	41
Oceania	29

n: 3,107

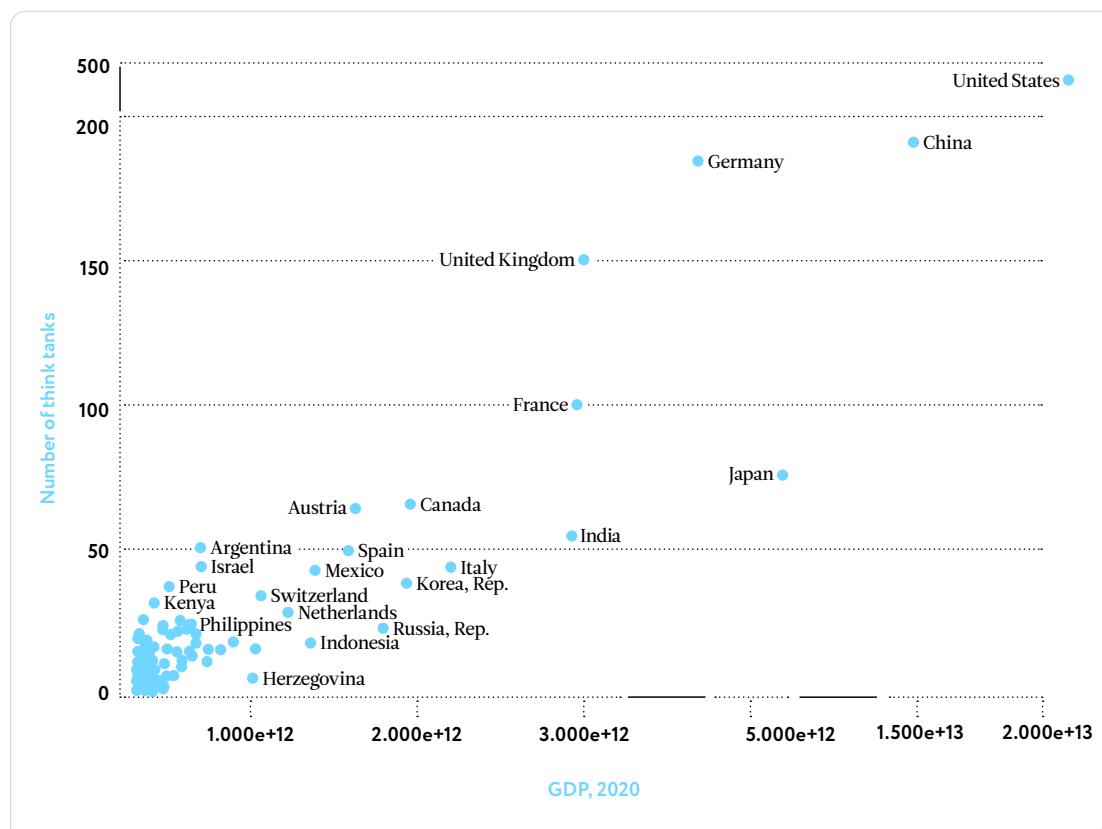
These numbers provide an initial overview of the size of the sector (in terms of organisations) in each region and imply that regions with a higher number of think tanks per country have a more active sector. But this can also be misleading as there are great differences by country within regions, and some countries have significantly larger sectors than others regions. The top five countries with the highest number of think tanks included in the database are the United States (452 organisations, 15% of the database), China (188, 6%), Germany (184, 6%), United Kingdom (150, 5%) and France (99, 3%). The countries with the highest number of think tanks in other regions follow far behind (Table 2), indicating the great variability between sectors by country.

Table 2.

Country with the highest number of think tanks per region		
Region	Country	# of think tanks
Africa	South Africa	43
Latin America & the Caribbean	Brazil	65
USA & Canada	United States	452
Eastern Asia	China	188
South & South-Eastern Asia	India	53
West & Central Asia	Israel	45
South & Eastern Europe	Spain	48
West & Northern Europe	Germany	184
Oceania	Australia	64

A correlation analysis shows that there is generally a positive correlation between the number of think tanks and the GDP¹⁴ of the country: as the number of think tanks increases so does the GDP. However, this trend is clearest in USA & Canada, Eastern Asia, West & Northern Europe and Oceania – the larger the number of think tanks in the country, the higher the GDP.

Chart 2.



¹⁴ Per country GDP for 2020 extracted from the World Bank [World Development Indicators](#).

5

Topic of focus

Questions answered in this chapter:

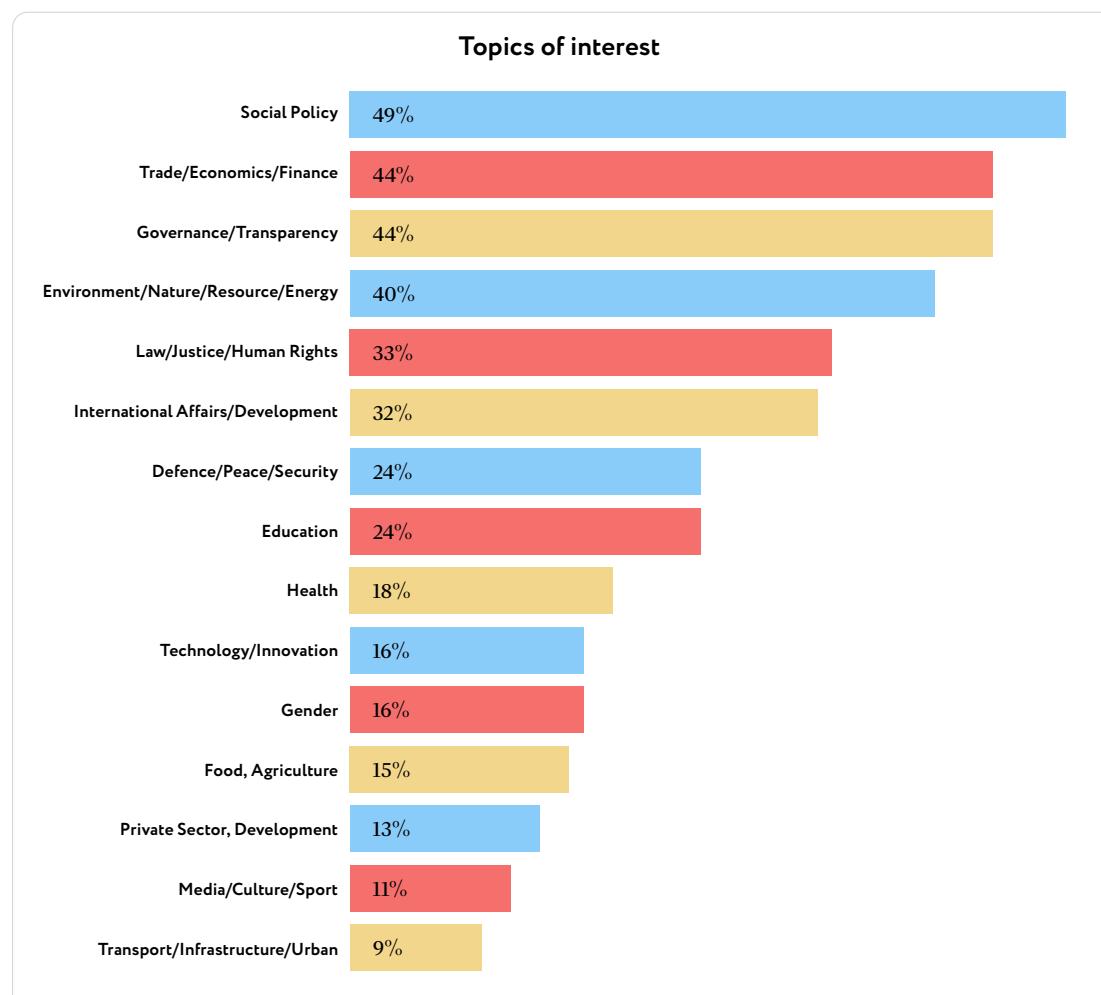
- Which topics do think tanks mostly focus on?
- Which topics are more, or less, predominant by region?
- How many topics do organisations usually focus on?

Topic of focus

Which topics do think tanks mostly focus on?

The list of topics¹⁵ included on the Open Think Tank Directory has been developed to provide an overview of the issues that an organisation focuses on, and to enable comparisons between them. The topic that most think tanks in the database focus on is social policy (49%), which includes issues such as poverty, social protection, social inclusion and inequality. Then come trade/economics/finance (44%); governance/transparency (44%), which comprises citizenship, democracy, transparency, decentralisation and related issues; and environment/natural resources/energy (40%). The least researched topic is transport/infrastructure/urban (9%). As these are broad topics, there has been almost no change from 2019 to 2021, and the slight changes reflect the inclusion of new organisations.

Chart 3



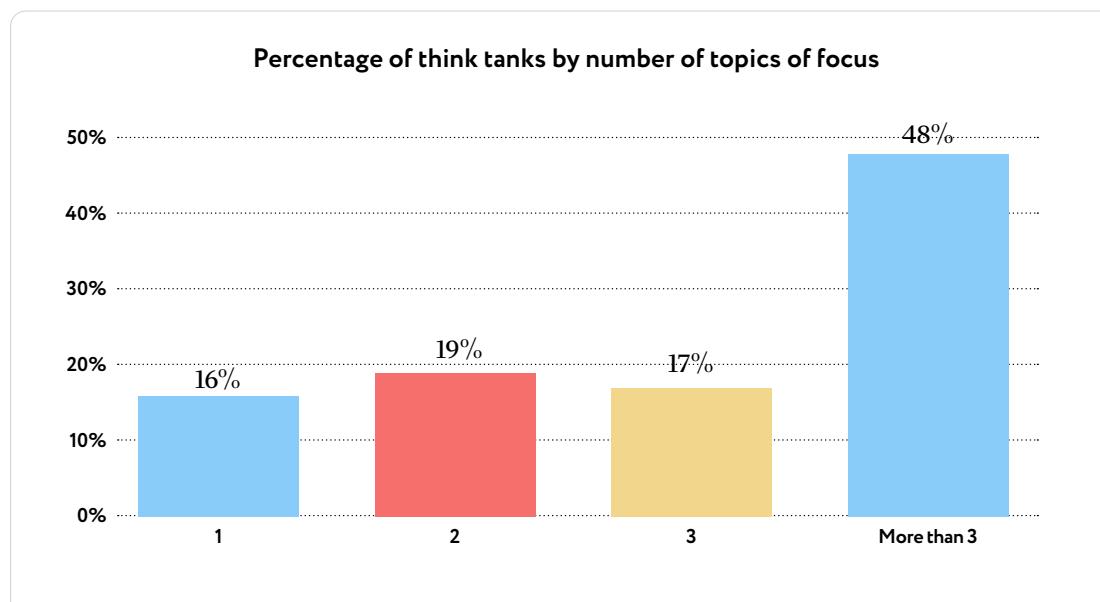
22

n: 3,107

¹⁵ See full list of topics and description here.

Each organisation can focus on any number of topics. Chart 4 shows that think tanks working on up to three topics¹⁶ account for 52% of the database. This indicates that most organisations focus on a few core issues and specialise in them. Of those that focus on only one topic, the vast majority work on environment/natural resources/energy (137 organisations), followed far behind by defence/peace/security (67 organisations).

Chart 4.



n: 3,107

Differences¹⁷

Table 3 presents the percentage of think tanks that focus on each topic per region. The most researched topic in Africa is governance/transparency (50% of think tanks in the region); environment/natural resources/energy in Latin America & the Caribbean (52%) and South & South-Eastern Asia (46%); trade/economics/finance in Eastern Asia (64%) and USA & Canada (42%); and social policy in Oceania (55%), South & Eastern Europe (59%), West & Central Asia (50%) and West & Northern Europe (54%). Food/agriculture was a key research area in Africa but not in others. Similarly, only West & Central Asia included international affairs/development as a key topic of interest at the regional level, although tied with governance/transparency. On the other hand, the least researched topics across most regions are transport/infrastructure/urban development and media/culture/sport.

¹⁶ Topics have been defined by the Open Think Tank Directory and have within them several issues, so think tanks focusing on a single topic may be researching many different issues within them.

¹⁷ We found little differences between regions, staff number groups and turnover groups on the number of topics they focus on.

Table 3.

Topics	Think tanks per region by number of topics of focus								
	Africa	Latin America and the Caribbean	USA & Canada	Eastern Asia	South & South-Eastern Asia	West & Central Asia	South & Eastern Europe	West & Northern Europe	Oceania
Defence/Peace/Security	24%	14%	28%	17%	33%	44%	25%	24%	20%
Education	29%	28%	26%	17%	24%	30%	26%	21%	23%
Environment/Natural Resources/Energy	45%	52%	41%	25%	46%	23%	29%	46%	36%
Food/Agriculture	40%	20%	15%	12%	24%	8%	5%	10%	12%
Gender	29%	21%	8%	7%	22%	21%	12%	16%	10%
Governance/Transparency	50%	40%	36%	49%	41%	49%	51%	45%	23%
Health	30%	14%	28%	8%	26%	10%	9%	19%	20%
International Affairs/Development	30%	15%	35%	32%	32%	49%	41%	33%	27%
Law/Justice/Human Rights	24%	40%	36%	25%	26%	26%	34%	39%	19%
Media/Culture/Sport	6%	4%	7%	26%	9%	16%	14%	11%	10%
Private Sector Development	18%	12%	8%	20%	12%	20%	14%	11%	9%
Social Policy	40%	46%	37%	53%	45%	50%	59%	54%	55%
Technology/Innovation	21%	11%	17%	16%	9%	12%	14%	23%	9%
Trade/Economics/Finance	45%	33%	42%	64%	43%	38%	45%	45%	40%
Transport/Infrastructure/Urban	9%	6%	11%	8%	8%	5%	8%	12%	13%
n:	11	445	517	348	261	189	352	697	6

6

Date founded

Questions answered in this chapter:

- What is the average think tank age?
- In what regions were think tanks founded earlier?
- When were most think tanks founded?
- Does this vary by region?

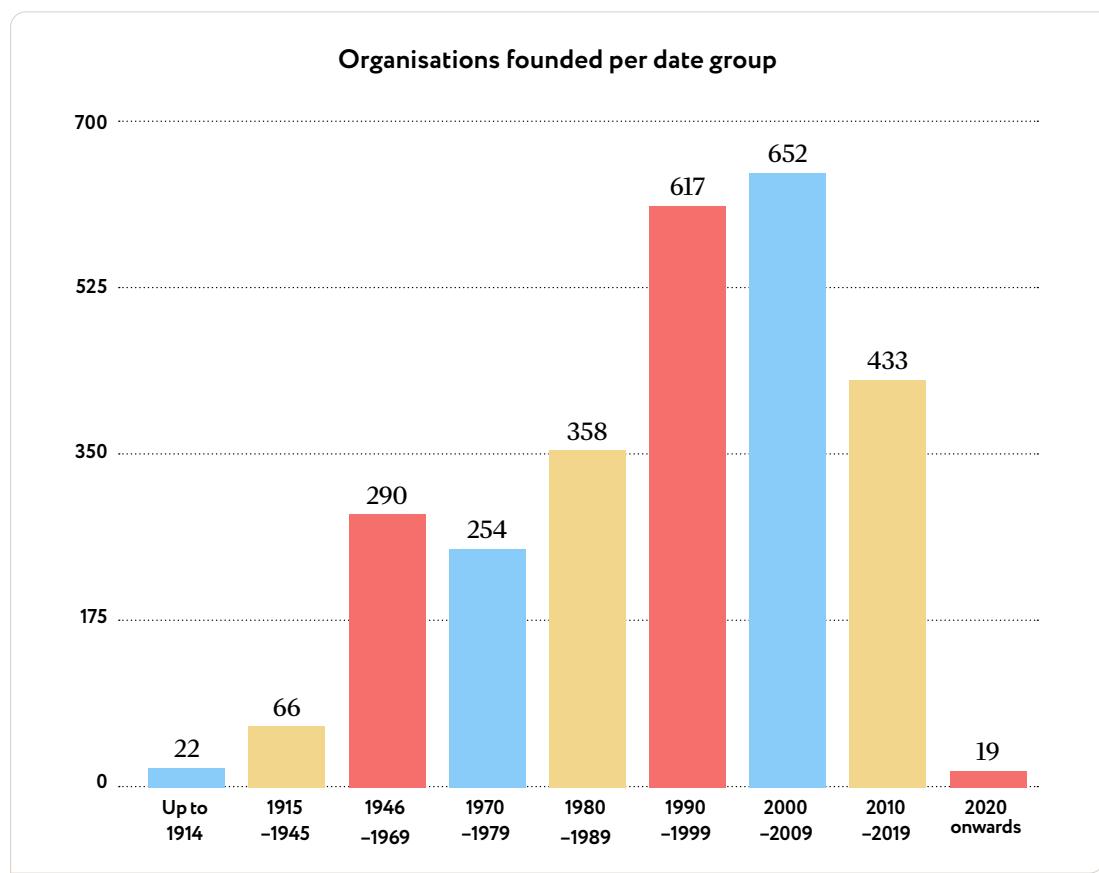
Date founded

What is the average think tank age?

The global average age for think tanks in 2021 was 30 years (median 22),¹⁸ with great variability between countries (22 years standard deviation). For ease of comparison we divided organisations into groups (based on their founding date): up to 1914, 1915–1945, 1946–1969, 1970–1979, 1980–1989, 1990–1999, 2000–2009 and 2010–2019.

Chart 5 shows a steady increase in think tanks from the 1940s onward, reaching a peak around the 2000s, followed by a slow decline in the last decade. Most think tanks were established in the periods between 1990–1999 (617, 23%) and 2000–2009 (652, 24%) when the chart reaches its peak. The following decade, 2010–2009, shows a decrease (331) in the number of think tanks founded. The next section discusses this trend by region.

Chart 5.



n:2,107

Differences

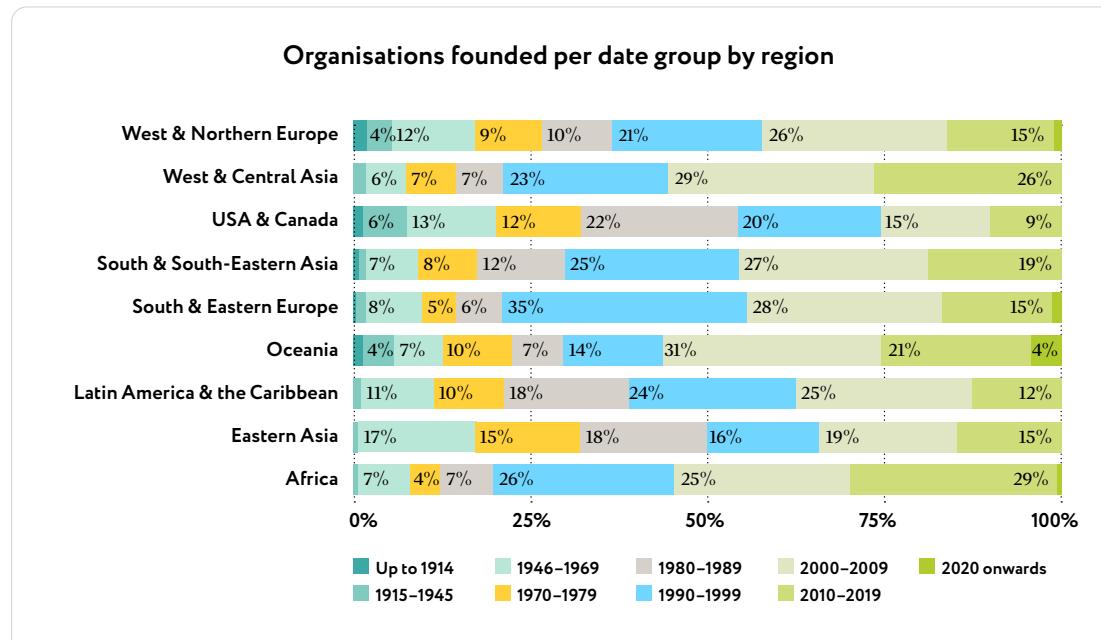
Chart 6 shows the distribution of founding years for each region. At the regional level, think tanks in USA & Canada are the oldest on average (37), and consequently have the oldest peak in think tank establishment: most were founded in 1980–1989 (92, 22%).

Think tanks in Eastern Asia have an average age of 33 and do not show a particular decade of peak think tank formation, but this is a function of the type of organisation, as several organisations founded earlier were rebranded as think tanks when the sector began to grow in the late 1990s.

Think tanks in West & Northern Europe are 32 years old on average, although the majority were also founded between 1990 and 2010. This is because many organisations in these regions are among the first founded and hence the average age is higher.

Think tanks in Latin America are 29 on average and show a founding peak between 1990 and 2010 consistent with the world averages. The youngest sectors are found in South & Eastern Europe (26), West & Central Asia (23) and Africa (22)

Chart 6.



n:2,711

Older think tanks tend to be male-founded and have a bigger staff size and bigger turnover than younger ones because they have had more time to establish themselves. This is described in chapters Staff, Founders and Turnover respectively.

7

Founders

Questions answered in this chapter:

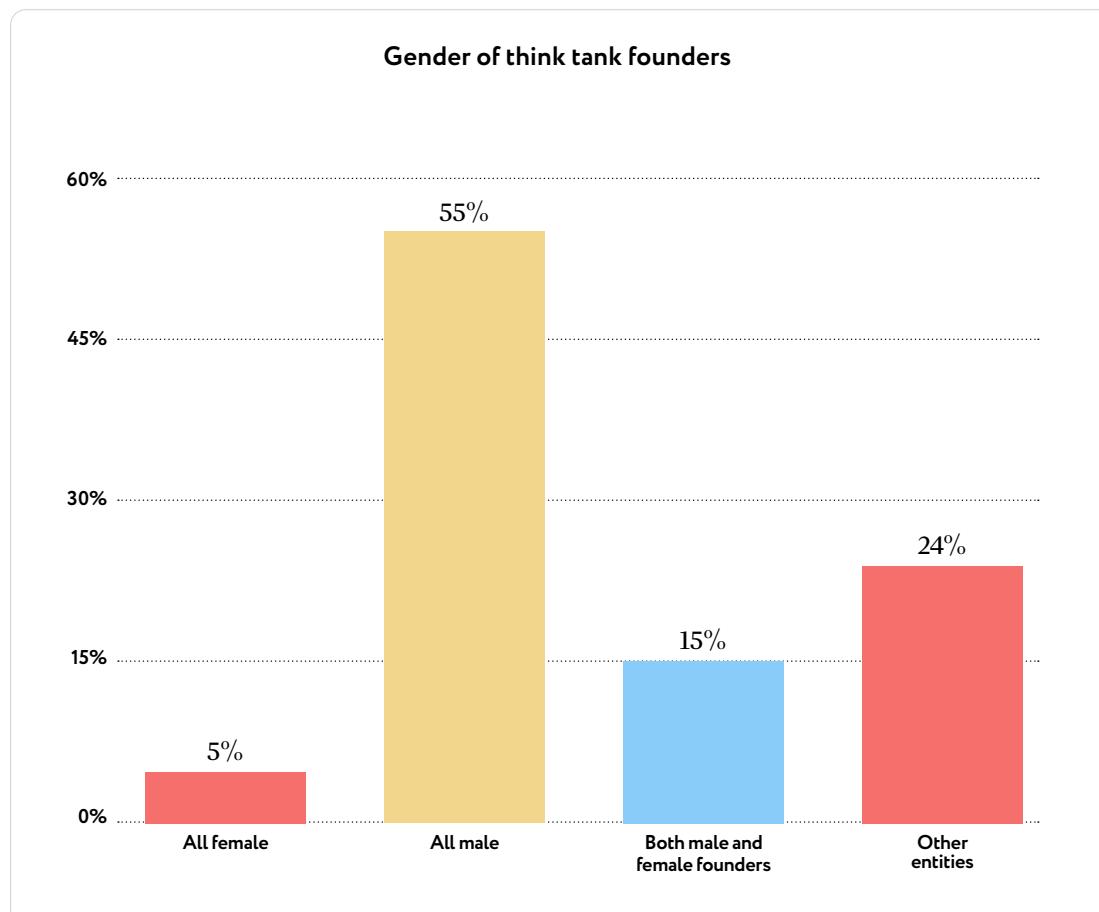
- Who founds think tanks?
- Which regions have more female founders?
- Are older think tanks predominantly male founded?

Founders

Who founds think tanks?

The directory holds data on the names of the founders for 1,632 organisations and has identified their gender, establishing the following categories: all male founders, all female founders, both male and female co-founders, and other entities. Other entities is used when the think tank self-reports that it was founded by other organisations or groups (e.g. governments, universities, companies, religious orders, international organisations) and does not recognise any named individual founder. Chart 7 shows that 55% of organisations were founded by men only, 15% by both male and female co-founders, 5% by women only and 24% by other entities.

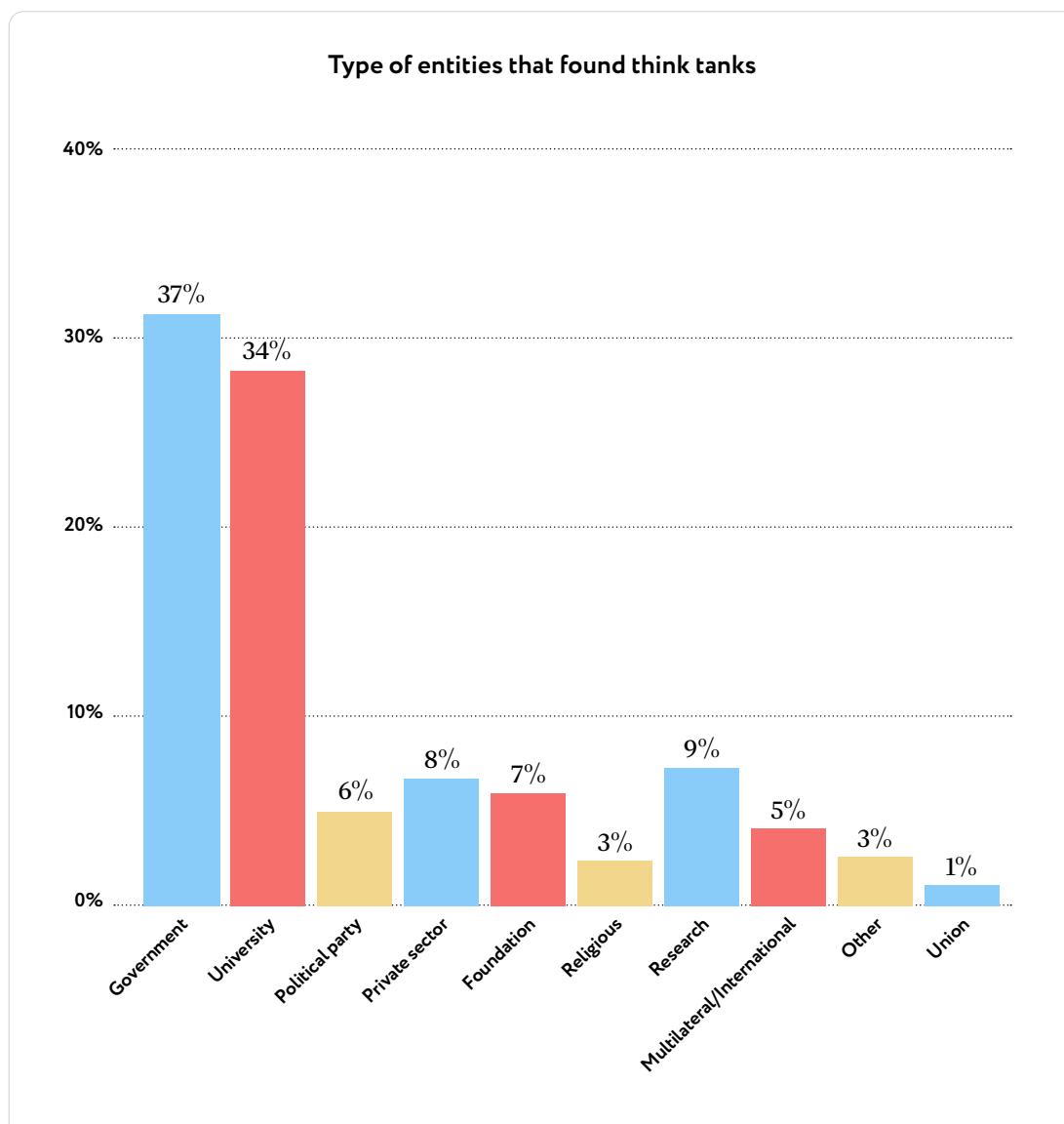
Chart 7.



n: 1,632

Out of those founded by other entities, the majority are either founded by government organisations (34%) or universities (34%), and to a smaller degree by other research organisations (9%), private sector organisations (8%), foundations (7%) and political parties (6%).

Chart 8.

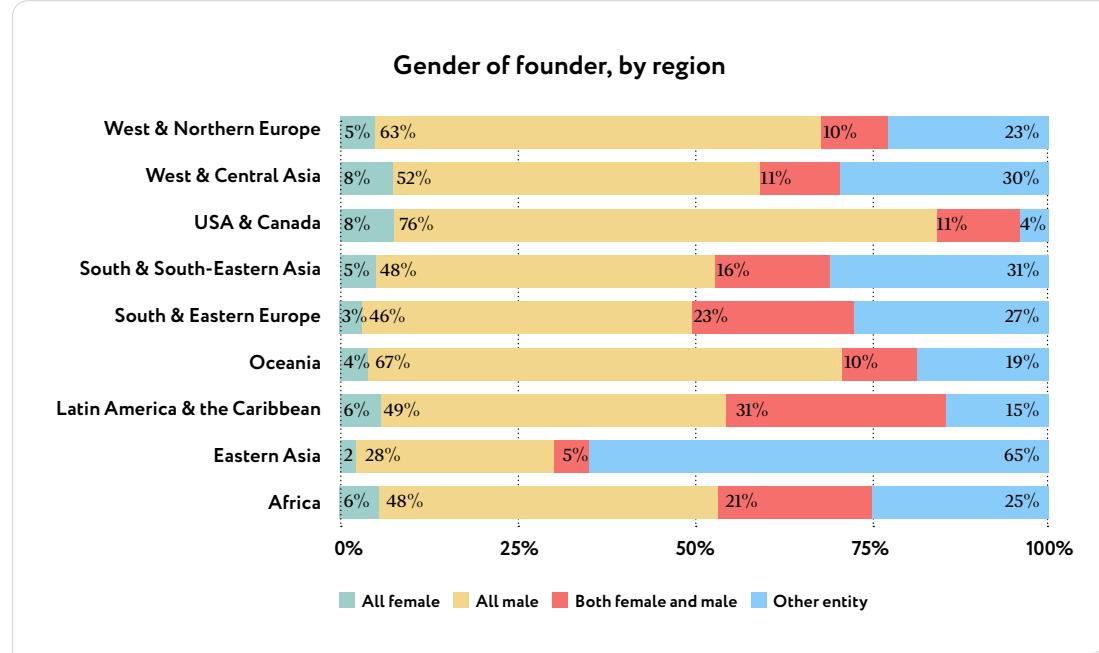


n: 507

Differences

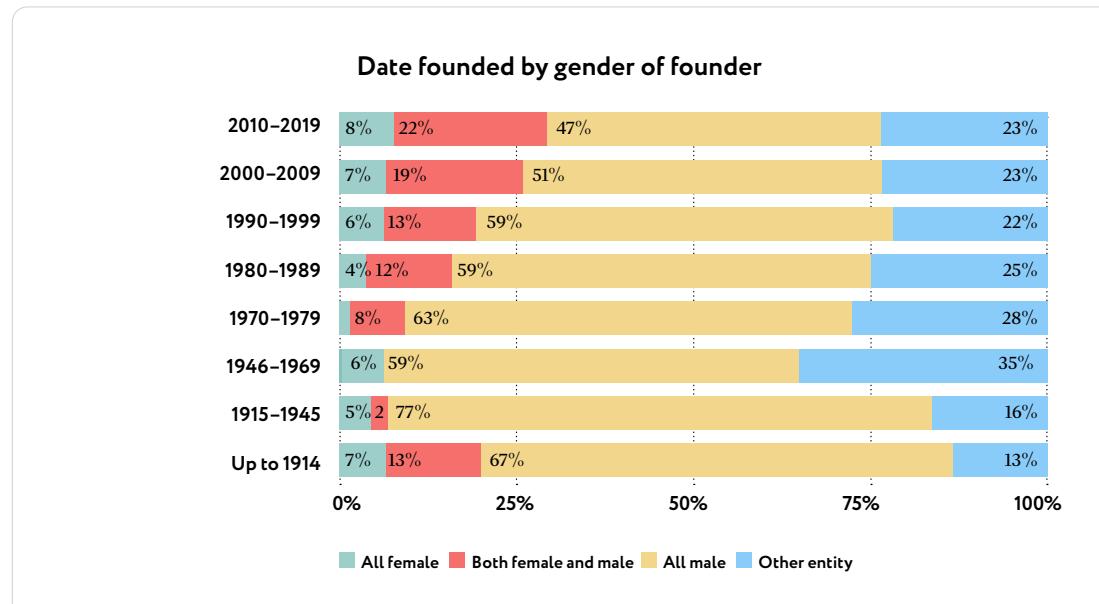
As the gender of the founder of a think tank is a stable variable, the changes seen in the results from last year are only a result of the increase in think tank numbers on the database and the new data accrued on existing records. Consistent with the 2019 report, USA & Canada has the greatest number of think tanks with male founders (76%), followed by West & Northern Europe (63%). USA & Canada and West & Central Asia have the greatest percentage of think tanks with female founders, both at 8%.

Chart 9.



The share of think tanks with male founders was highest in 1915–1945 and the percentage started decreasing from 1980–1989. And although the number of think tanks founded by women (all female and both male and female co-founders) has been slowly increasing through the years, even in the last decades think tanks are still predominantly male founded.

Chart 10.



note: 14 think tanks in the OTTD were founded from 2020 onwards, 7 by all male founders and the other 50% by both male and female co-founders

8

Business model

Questions answered in this chapter:

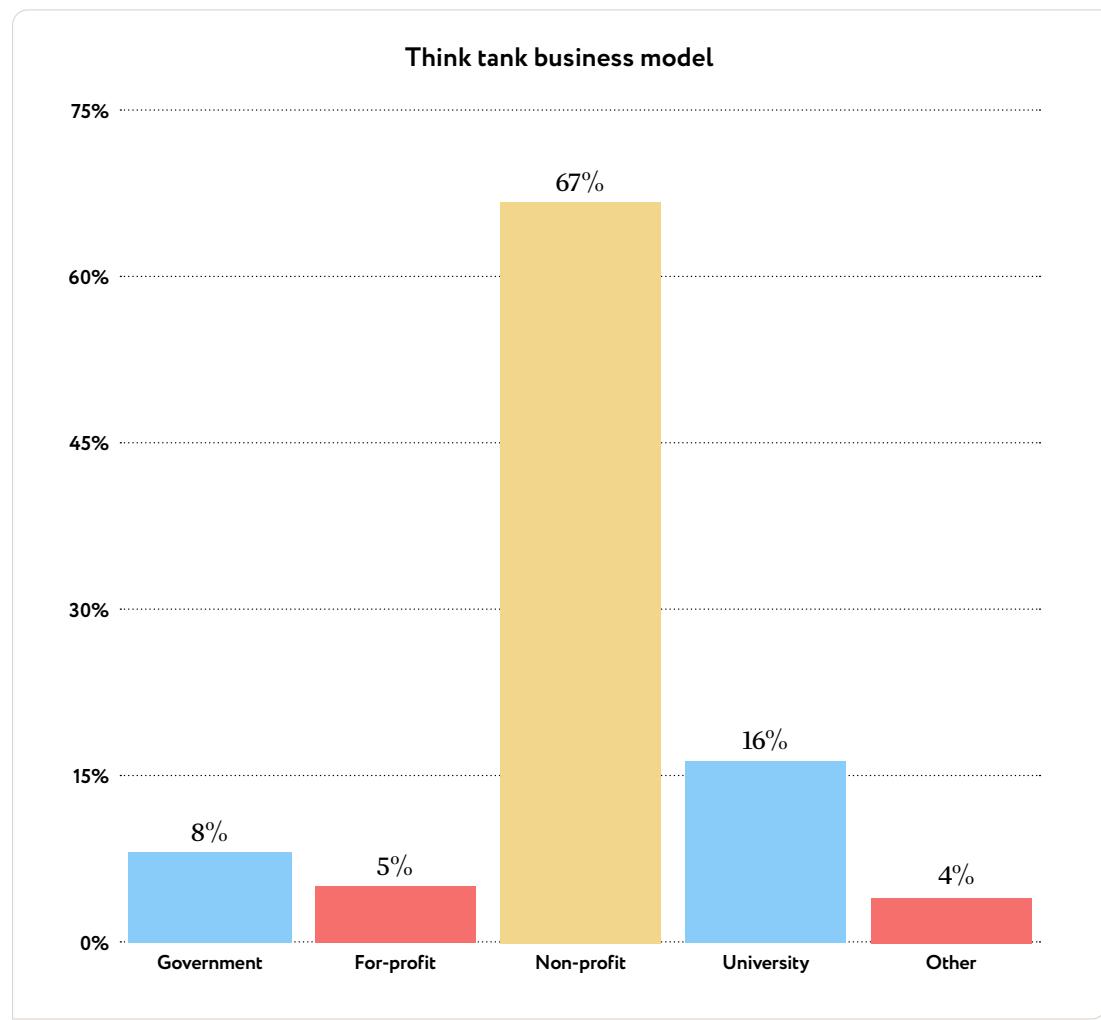
- What is the most common business model for think tanks?
- Does this vary by region?

Business model

What is the most common business model for think tanks?

The Open Think Tank Directory lists the business model of organisations, understood as how they are registered and operated. For comparability, as with the other variables, we have limited the number of business model options to: for-profit, non-profit, government organisation, university institute or centre and other.¹⁹ The majority of think tanks for which we have business model data (2,819 are non-profit organisations (67%), followed by university institutes or centres (16%), government organisations (8%), for-profit organisations (5%) and a small group of other (4%). Generally, this is consistent with the findings in the previous report, with a slight change in the percentages for government organisations (down from 10%) and other (up from 2%).

Chart 11.



¹⁹ Organisations that mentioned multiple business models were classified as other.

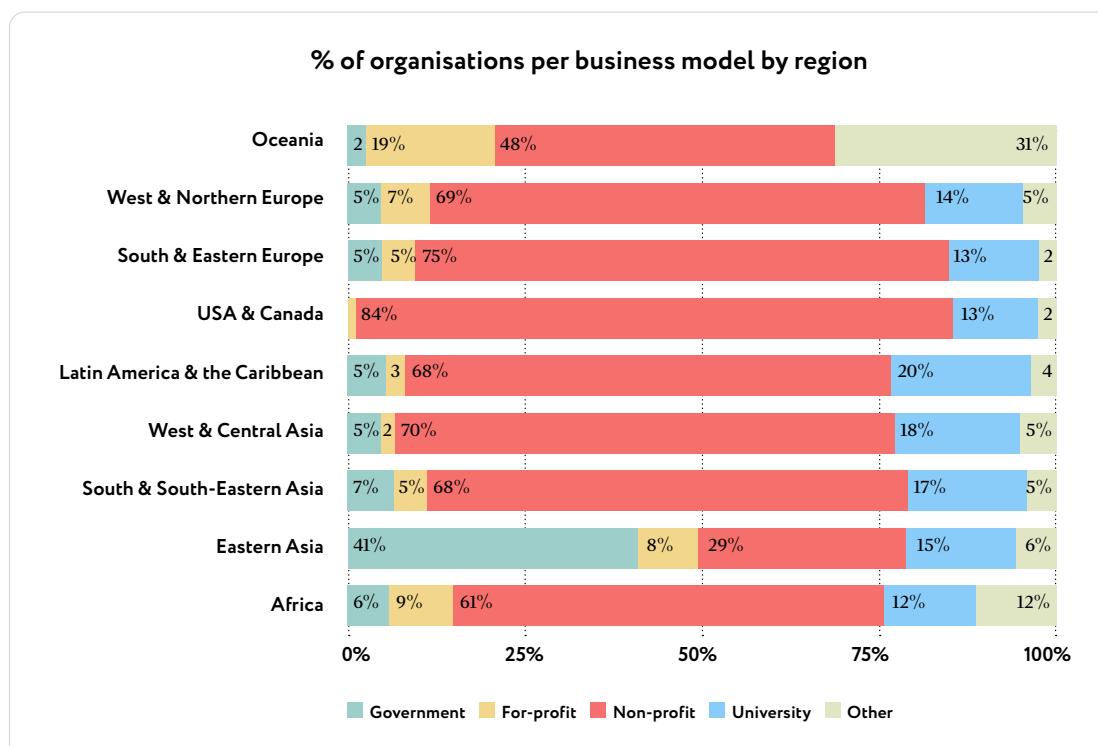
Differences²⁰

Chart 12 shows that at the regional level, all regions except Eastern Asia featured non-profit as the predominant business model among organisations, consistent with the overall trend. In Eastern Asia, most think tanks are government organisations (41%) and non-profit only comes second (29%) but this is mostly driven by China, where the percentage of government think tanks is 59%, and to a smaller degree by South Korea (32% government think tanks).

Consistent with the previous report and the history of think tanks in the region, as well as the legal framework, USA & Canada has the largest percentage of non-profit think tanks. It also has the smallest percentage of think tanks classified as government (0.2%), for-profit (0.9%) and other (2%) across the region. Africa has the lowest percentage of think tanks classified as university institutes or centres (12%), followed by USA & Canada (13%) and South & Eastern Europe (13%).

As in the previous report, Latin America & the Caribbean have a higher-than-average percentage of university institute/centre think tanks (20%), but it is unclear if this is due to the methodology of the scoping exercises or an underlying trend in the region.

Chart 12.



n: 2,939

²⁰ Differences with variables other than region were also explored. For example, government organisations (although mostly led by China) tend to have a higher turnover. Other trends were not explored in this edition of the report and we invite interested readers to explore the database and uncover any trends and relationships we might have overlooked.

9

Publications

Questions answered in this chapter:

- How many publications do think tanks release per year?
- How does this vary by region?

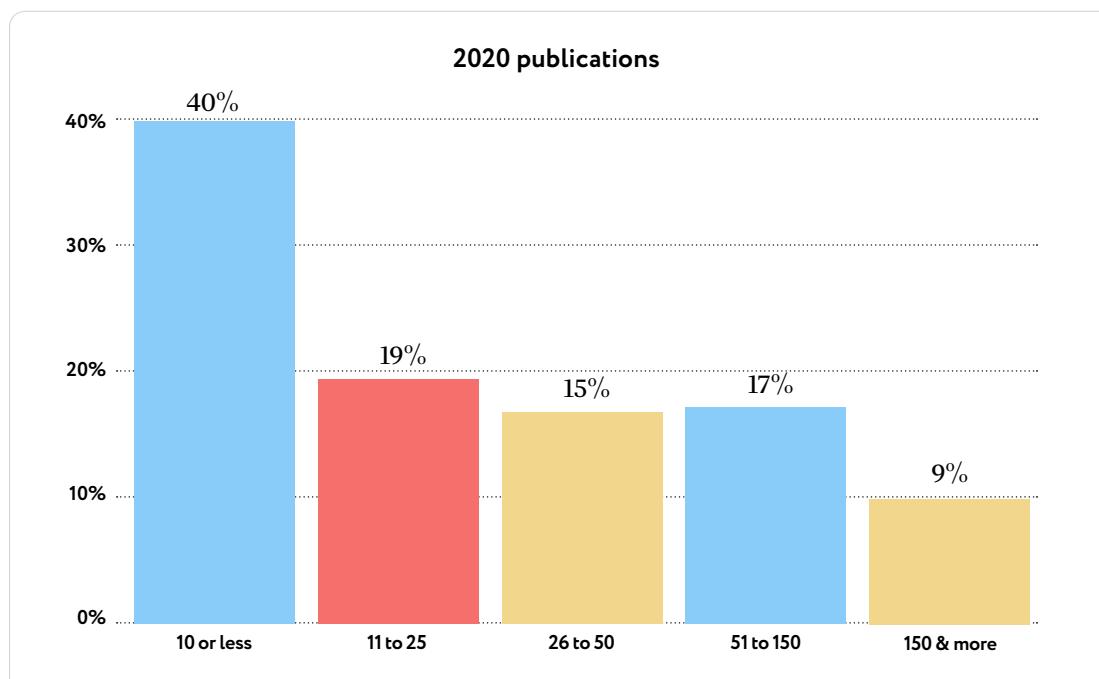
Publications

How much do think tanks publish?

The Open Think Tank Directory registers the number of publications per year (not counting brochures or blogs). This is either the number reported by think tanks (only for around 10% of those that have publication data) or what fieldworkers found on their websites (either reported in an annual review or manually counted). Given this the results in this chapter should be read as trends.

Most of the think tanks with information on publications (Chart 13) have published up to 10 pieces of written work in 2020 (40%), and a small group (9%) published more than 150.

Chart 13.

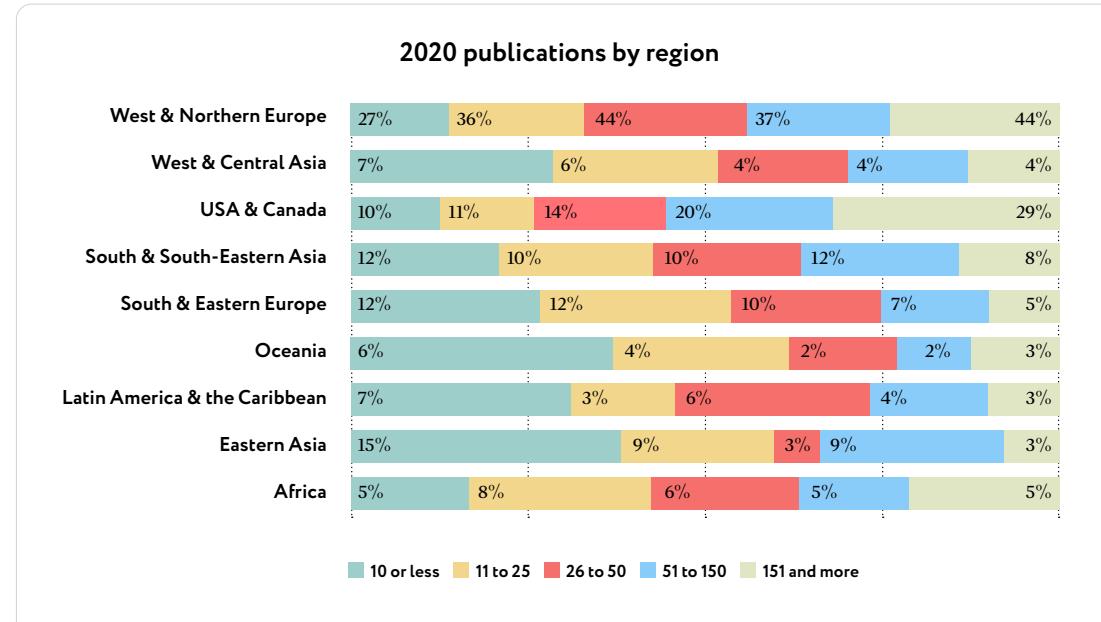


n: 966

Differences

An analysis by region (Chart 14) shows that think tanks in Eastern Asia, USA & Canada and West & Northern Europe publish more than their counterparts in other regions; this is consistent with the results in other chapters, as think tanks in these regions are bigger, and have a higher turnover and more staff.

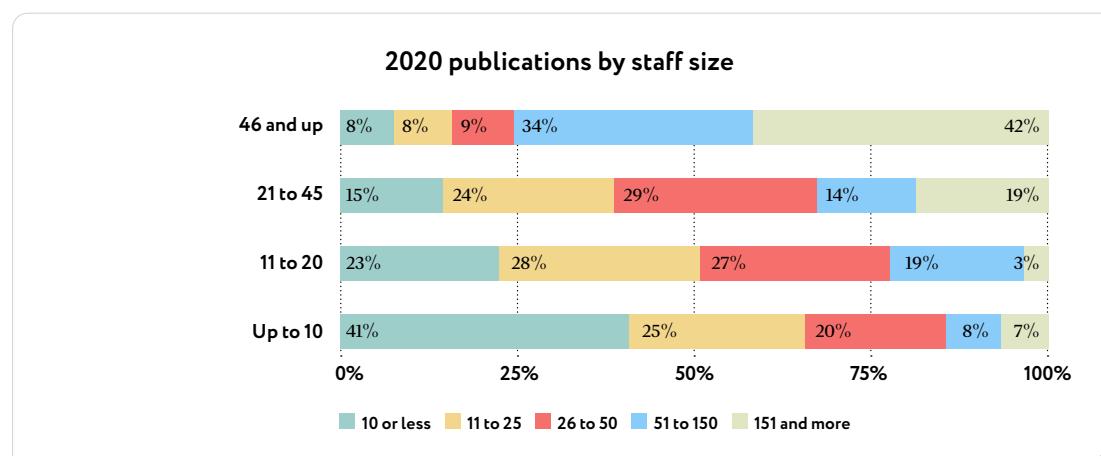
Chart 14.



n: 966

As would be expected, Chart 15 shows that larger teams generate more publications compared with smaller teams. The general trend is that more than half of the think tanks with up to 45 staff members tend to publish up to 50 pieces in a year, whereas those with bigger staff sizes (46 and up) tend to publish more than 50.

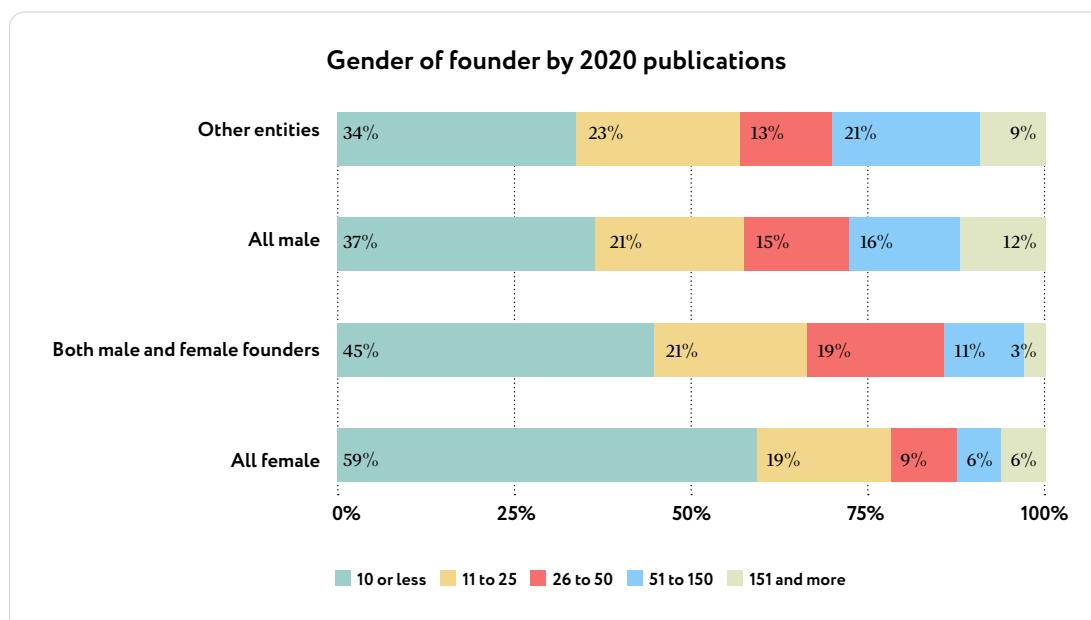
Chart 15.



n: 369

As the 2019 report showed, and as is also evident in this edition, the gender of the founder of a think tank seems to have long-lasting effects on several aspects of their operation. Chart 16 displays publication numbers for 2020 based on the gender of the founders (or other entity) and shows that think tanks founded by all-female founders have the smallest publication output, while those founded by all men have a much higher number of publications, similar to those founded by other entities.

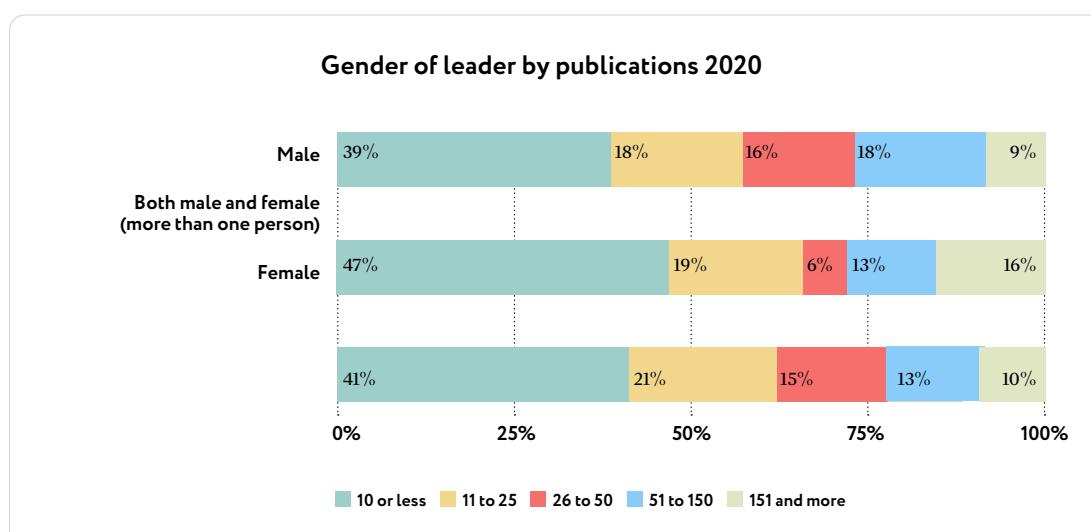
Chart 16.



n: 610

The data also shows a small tendency for think tanks with male leaders to publish more pieces than female-led organisations (Chart 17).

Chart 17.



n: 610

note: Uses latest leader gender up to 2020.

10

Turnover

Questions answered in this chapter:

- What are the average and median turnovers for think tanks?
- Which regions have the highest and lowest turnover?

Turnover

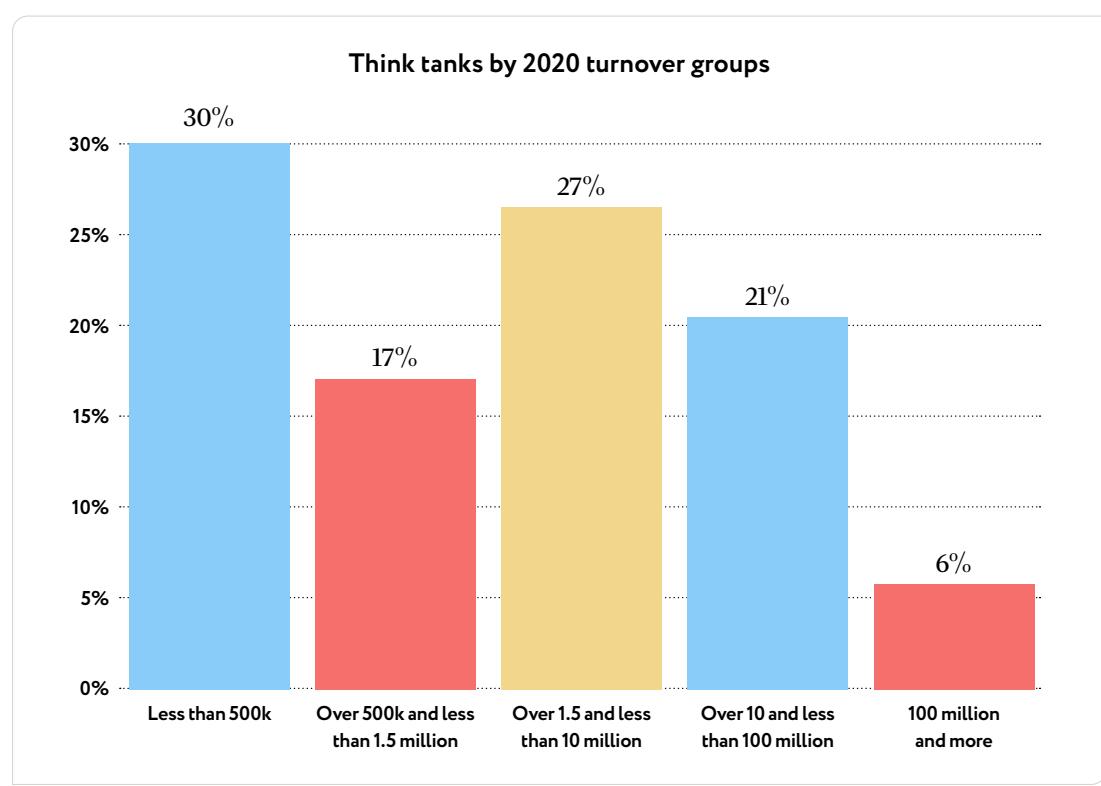
What are the average and median turnovers for think tanks?

The Open Think Tank Directory registers the turnover of the organisations it features, but it is one of the least complete variables, with data held for less than 10% of organisations. The lack of data is mainly because most organisations do not show or share their turnover information, or when they do it is difficult to uncover and buried deep within difficult-to-read reports. Because of this, this chapter, more than any other, offers only a description and a database-level explanation of the results. Nevertheless, the results are interesting and indicate trends and patterns that need to be explored further.

The average turnover of the 263 organisations for which we have turnover data in 2020 is USD 28,700,000 and the median USD 2,085,113. But as these organisations are not the same as those we had data on in 2019, we cannot establish whether there has been a change in turnover data at this stage.

Chart 18 displays the distribution of think tanks by turnover groups, and shows, consistent with the 2019 report, that most think tanks in the database have a turnover of 1.5 million or less. The next section explores how this compares by region.

Chart 18.



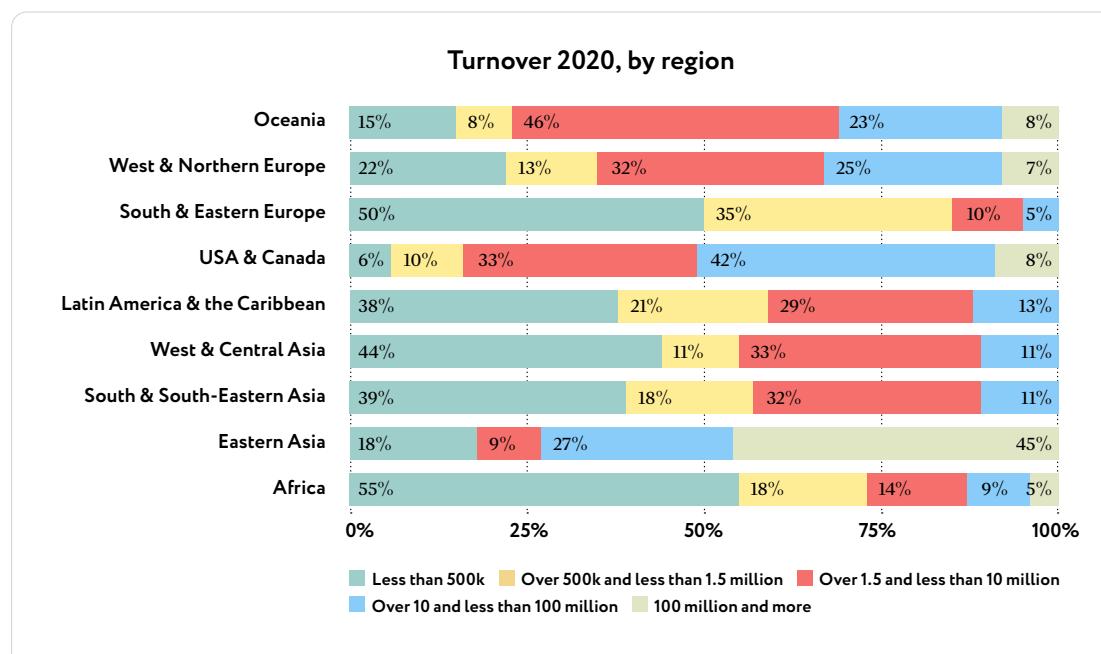
Differences²¹

Among think tanks with turnover data for 2020, most had a turnover of less than USD 500,000 (30%) and over USD 1.5 million but less than USD 10 million (28%). Most organisations in Africa (55%), Latin America & the Caribbean (38%), South & Eastern Europe (50%), South & South-Eastern Asia (39%) and West & Central Asia (44%) had a turnover of less than USD 500,000 in 2020. More think tanks in Oceania (46%) and West & Northern Europe (32%) had a turnover of more than USD 1.5 million but less than USD 10 million, while in USA & Canada 42% of think tanks turned over more than USD 10 million but less than USD 100 million.

Most think tanks with a non-profit business model (30%), university institute or centre (33%) or other (53%) had a turnover of less than USD 500,000 in 2020, while think tanks with a government business model mostly had a turnover of USD 100 million or more (54%).

Only Eastern Asia had almost half (45%) of its think tanks (with turnover data) turn over USD 100 million or more. This was driven primarily by China, where five think tanks reported a turnover of USD 155 million to USD 748 million in 2020. These are the same five think tanks with a government business model that had a turnover of over USD 100 million.

Chart 19.

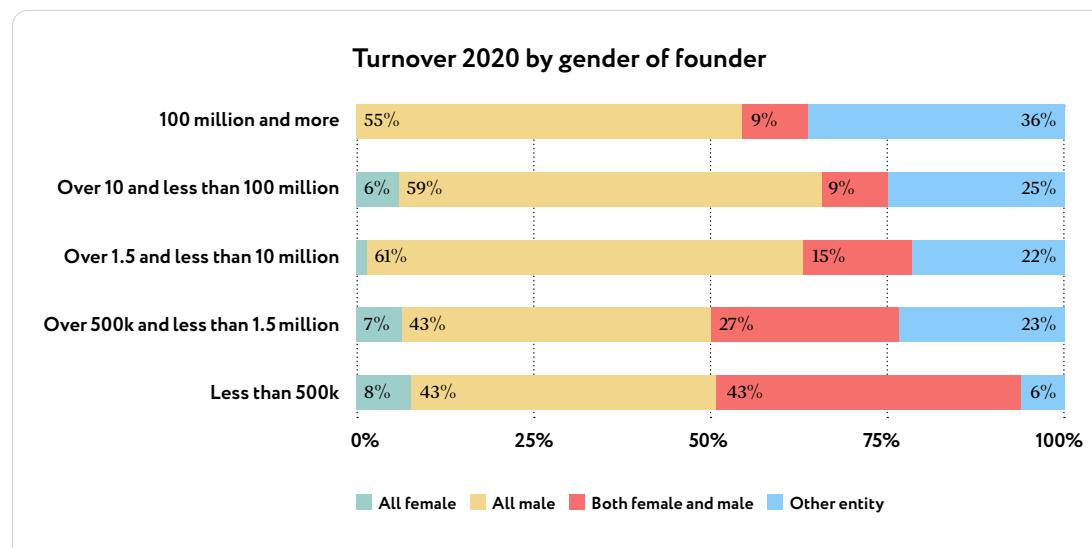


n: 263

²¹ Due to the small number of organisations that shared their turnover data we have not explored comparisons with many variables, as the data did not allow for it. But turnover and gender of leader and gender of founder are found in the following chapters.

As the 2019 report also showed, think tanks founded by men have a higher turnover, as Chart 20 shows.

Chart 20.



n: 182

What has changed since 2019?

Of the 193 organisations for which we had turnover data in both 2019 and 2020, the average change in turnover is positive, and up by 3.85%, but the median change is 0%.²² But a closer look at the data shows variability between different sized think tanks. Most of the organisations with a turnover of less than USD 500,000 (50%), over USD 500,000 but less than USD 1.5 million (56%), and USD 100 million and more (73%) showed a decrease in turnover, mostly of up to -25% (32%, 49% and 73% respectively). On the other hand, most think tanks with a turnover of over USD 1.5 million but less than USD 10 million (51%) and over USD 10 million but less than USD 100 million (66%) indicated an increase in revenue, with most think tanks showing an increase in turnover of up to 25% (40% and 66%, respectively).

Table 4 shows the range of turnover change from 2019 to 2020. Almost half of the think tanks with turnover change information had a negative turnover change from 2019 to 2020 (48%) and 47% of the think tanks showed an increase in turnover. Most of the think tanks showed a decline of -25% to -0.1% (39%) or an increase of 0.4% to 25% (33%).

²² Two organisations with information on turnover change (%) were excluded from table and consequent analysis because they are outliers (1,366.7% and 95,900%).

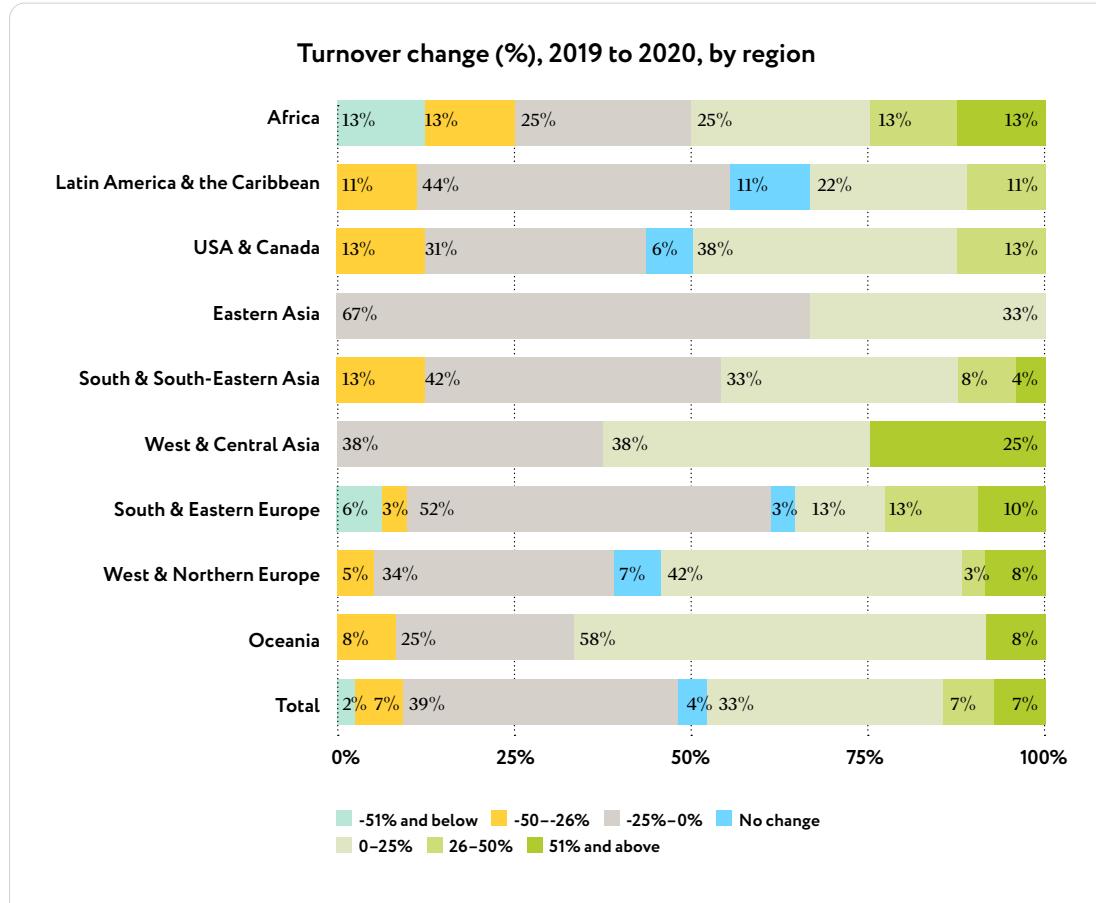
Table 4.

Turnover change (%), 2019 to 2020		
Turnover change (%)	Freq.	Percent
-51% and below	4	2%
-50--26%	14	7%
-25-0%	75	39%
No change	8	4%
0-25%	64	33%
26-50%	14	7%
51 and above	14	7%
Total	193	100%

n: 193, min: -68, max: 200

Half of the think tanks in Africa (50%) decreased their turnover (up to -68%) and the other half increased it (up to 75.2%). Most of the think tanks in Eastern Asia (67%), South & Eastern Europe (52%), Latin America & the Caribbean (44%) and South & South-Eastern Asia (42%) showed a decline in turnover between -25% and -0.1%, while most of the organisations in Oceania (58%), West & Northern Europe (42%) and USA & Canada (38%) showed an increase in turnover of up to 25%. In West & Central Asia, most organisations showed an increase in turnover of up to 25% (38%) and another 38% showed a decline in turnover. Only a small portion (4%) of the think tanks indicated no change in turnover, primarily driven by Latin America & the Caribbean (11%), West & Northern Europe (7%), USA & Canada (6%) and South & Eastern Europe (3%).

Chart 21.



n: 193

We also looked at 187 think tanks that had information on business model and 2019 to 2020 turnover change, and found that most of the think tanks classified as government (73% of 11 think tanks) and for-profit (67% of six think tanks) showed a decline in turnover, while most non-profits (48% of 152 think tanks) and universities (57% of seven think tanks) had an increase in turnover. However, as previously mentioned, these figures should be analysed with caution due to large variations in sample size for each business model.

11

Staff

Questions answered in this chapter:

- What is the median staff size of think tanks?
- What is the percentage of women working in think tanks?
- How does this differ by region?
- Do male-led think tanks have more staff?
- Do female-led think tanks have a higher percentage of female staff?

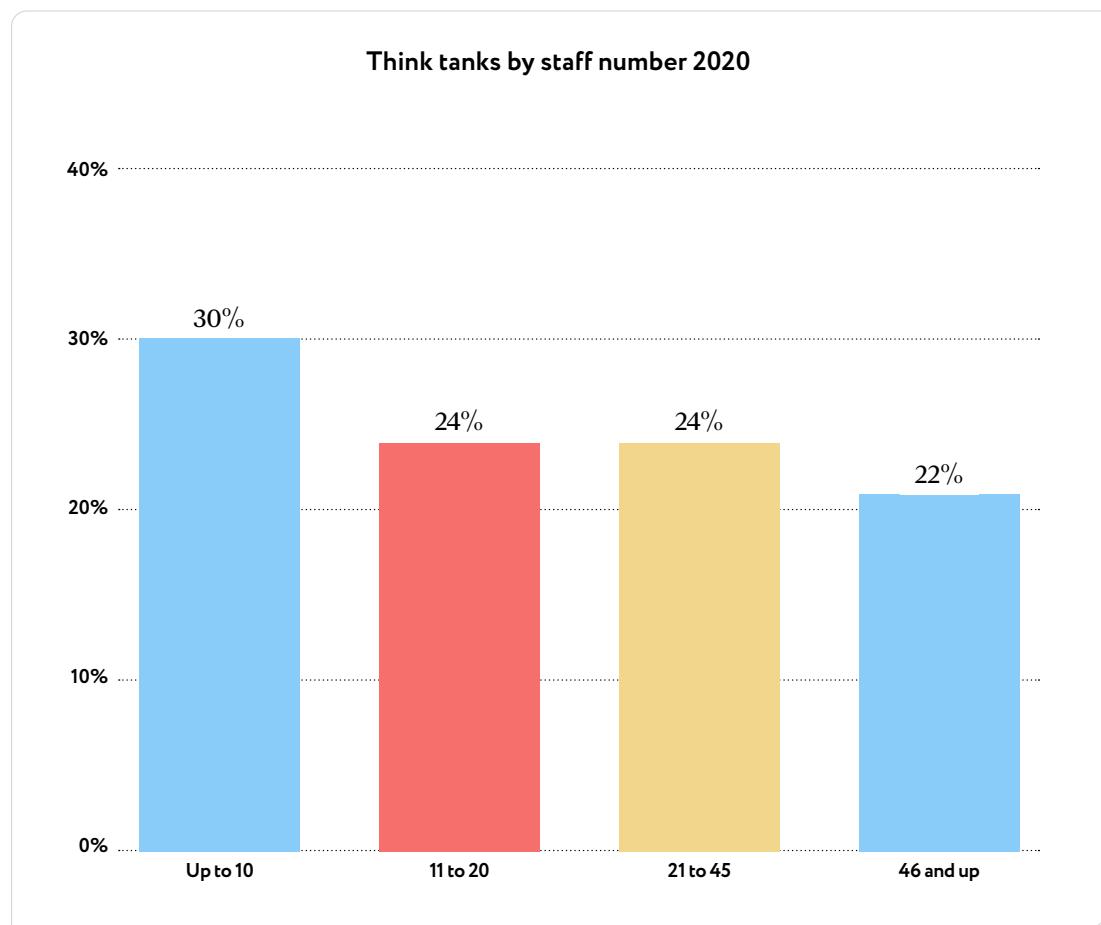
Staff

What is the staff size of think tanks?²³

The median staff size for think tanks in 2021 is 18 (which shows a decrease from 2019 data), and the average % of female staff in 2021 is 47% (which shows an increase from 2019 data [44%]).

Chart 22 shows the number of think tanks by staff numbers, and evidence that most think tanks in the database are small organisations with less than 10 staff (30%).

Chart 22.



²³ The Chinese Academy of Sciences has not been included in the analysis as it an outlier and heavily skews the averages.

Differences

The comparisons of staff numbers by region, date founded, gender of leader and gender of founder show the same pattern (albeit with small differences) as the 2019 report. In terms of region (Chart 23) Eastern Asia has the highest percentage of organisations with 46 staff members and above. In terms of age, older organisations have a higher number of staff (Chart 24). Male-led and male-founded organisations have a higher number of staff than female-led or female-founded organisations, and organisations founded by other entities have the highest staff average and median (although this is mostly led by organisations in China) (Tables 5 & 6). Think tanks with a female leader have more female staff (62%) than male-led organisations. Moreover, think tanks with a mix of both male and female leaders also have more female staff (55%) than male-led think tanks, and appear to have a better employee gender balance (Table 7).

Chart 23.

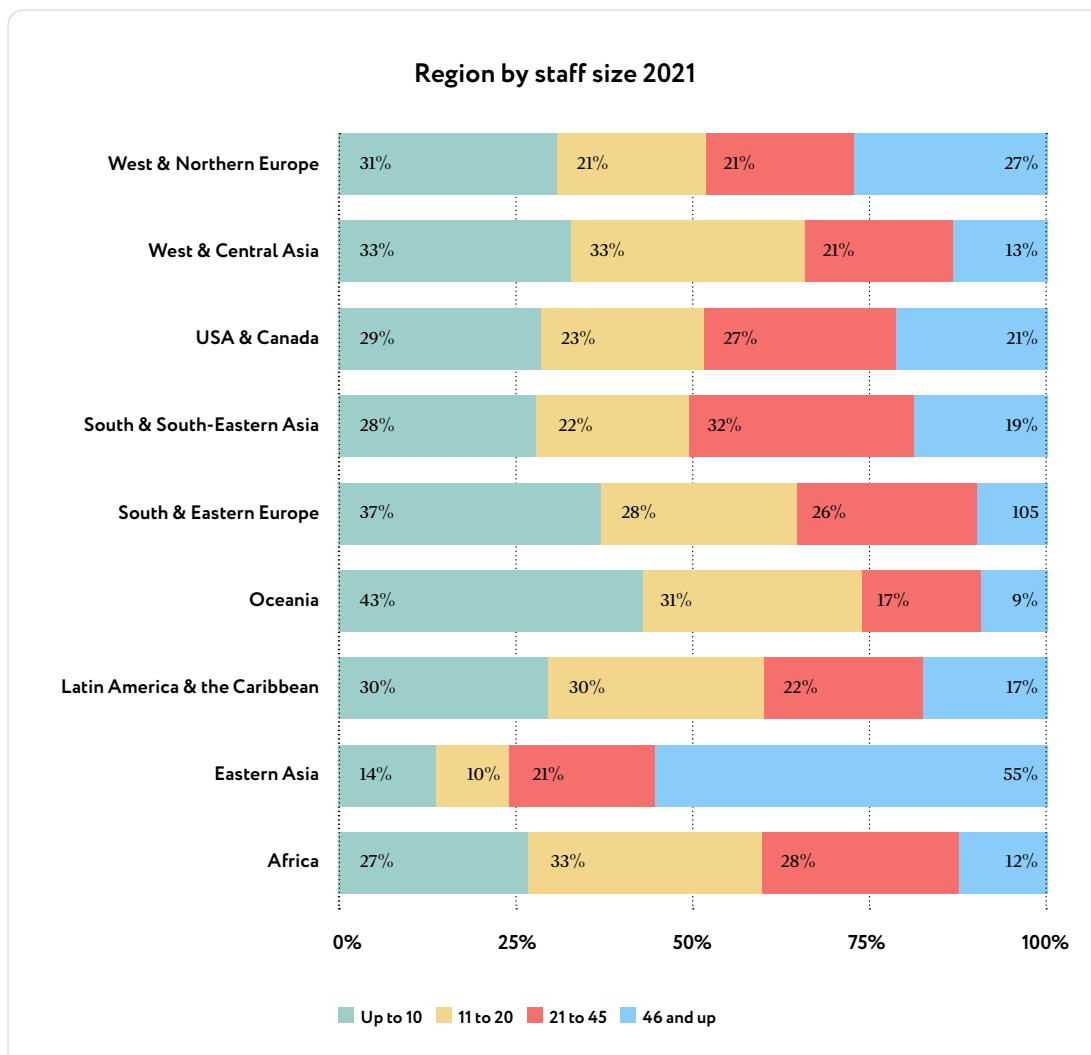
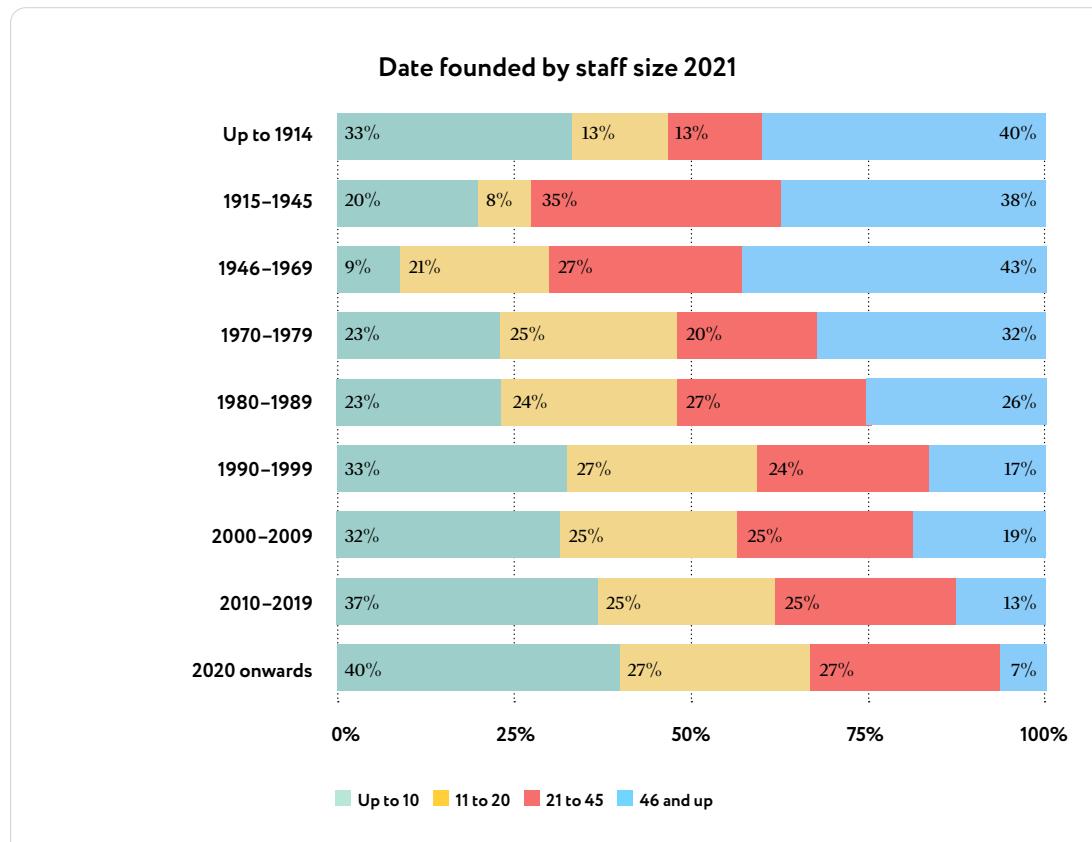


Chart 24.



n: 1,493

Table 5.

Staff size indicators by gender of leader			
Gender of leader	Average Staff	Median staff	Max number of staff
Female	37	17	628
Male	55	19	5110

n: 2,622

Table 6.

Staff size indicators by gender of founder			
Gender of founder	Average Staff	Median staff	Max number of staff
All female	29	14	177
All male	37	19	625
Both male and female	25	15	301
Other entities	109	26	5110

n: 1,631

Table 7.

Percentage of female staff (2021), by gender of leader (2021)	
Gender of leader	Average % of female staff
Both male and female (more than one person)	55%
Female	62%
Male	44%
<i>n:1,504</i>	

What has changed since 2019?

In 2019, 1,188 think tanks reported staff size (median: 19) and 1,717 in 2021 (median: 18). There is staff size data for both years for a total of 770 think tanks. This section will analyse only the organisations for which the OTTD holds data for both years.

At the regional level, the median tends to be lower in 2021 for Africa, Latin America & the Caribbean, South & Eastern Europe, West & Central Asia, and West & Northern Europe. The median is highest among think tanks in Eastern Asia.

Table 8.

Median staff size (organizations with information for both 2019 and 2021)									
	Africa	Eastern Asia	Latin America & the Caribbean	Oceania	South & Eastern Europe	South & South-Eastern Asia	USA & Canada	West & Central Asia	West & Northern Europe
2019	19	119	17.5	11	16	19	15	15	19.5
2021	15	141	16	12.5	15	23	16.5	13	19
<i>n =</i>	13	40	14	26	101	39	150	29	358

n: 771

The average staff change from 2019 to 2021 is 7% and median 0%. Table 9 shows the range of staff change from 2019 to 2021. Almost half of the think tanks (47%) with staff change information increased their number of staff from 1% up to 200% from 2019 to 2021, but there were also 33% of think tanks who showed a decline in the number of staff. Finally, 20% showed no change in staff size.

Table 9.

Staff change (%), 2019 to 2021		
Staff change (%)	Freq.	Percent
< 0% (decrease)	257	33%
No change	154	20%
1–25%	237	31%
26–50%	70	9%
50% and above	52	7%
Total	770	100%

n: 770, min: -64, max: 300

At the regional level (Table 10), Africa and Eastern Asia showed the most change in staff size. Africa had the greatest number of think tanks that showed a decline in staff numbers (69%), followed by Oceania (50%). About a third of the think tanks in Eastern Asia (32%), Latin America & the Caribbean (36%), South & South-Eastern Asia (36%) and West & Northern Europe (35%) had an increase in staff size of up to 25%. South & Eastern Europe and West & Central Asia had a negative change in number of staff (more than 40% of think tanks in both regions show a decrease in staff numbers). Almost a third (28%) of the think tanks in USA & Canada showed an increase in number of staff of up to 25%, but 25% of think tanks in this region also shrunk in staff size. On average, across the world, a third of think tanks (33%) had a negative staff number, but another third (31%) had an increase in staff numbers of up to 25%.

Table 10.

Staff change (%), 2019 to 2021 (by region)										
	Africa	Eastern Asia	Latin America & the Caribbean	Oceania	South & Eastern Europe	South & South-Eastern Asia	USA & Canada	West & Central Asia	West & Northern Europe	Total
< 0% (decrease)	69%	24%	29%	50%	42%	26%	25%	41%	34%	33%
No change	0%	39%	21%	23%	20%	18%	21%	28%	17%	20%
1–25%	31%	32%	36%	15%	25%	36%	28%	14%	35%	31%
26–50%	0%	5%	7%	4%	13%	15%	13%	3%	8%	9%
51 and above	0%	0%	7%	8%	1%	5%	13%	14%	6%	7%
n	13	41	14	26	101	39	150	29	357	770

Close to half of government think tanks (43%) had a 1–25% change in number of staff (Table 11). Moreover, more government think tanks showed no change in staff size compared to other business models, and they had the lowest number of think tanks (18%) with a negative change in staff size. On the other hand, think tanks with a non-profit business model showed the least number of think tanks that indicated no change in their staff size. For-profit think tanks primarily showed a 1–25% increase in number of staff (34%); non-profit think tanks primarily showed a decrease in staff size (34%); university institute or centre think tanks mostly decreased their staff size (40%); and lastly, think tanks that were classified as other mostly showed an increase of 1–25% in staff size (45%).

Table 11.

Staff change (%), 2019 to 2021 (by business model)						
	Government	For-profit	Non-profit	University	Other	Total
< 0% (decrease)	18%	25%	34%	40%	28%	33%
1–25%	43%	34%	30%	22%	45%	30%
No change	30%	25%	18%	24%	24%	20%
26–50%	8%	3%	11%	7%	0%	10%
50% and above	3%	13%	8%	7%	3%	7%
n:	40	32	517	103	29	721

The gender of the think tank leader did not result in a big difference in the number of think tanks that showed an increase in staff size. Among think tanks with a female leader, 46% showed a staff increase of at least 1% and 47% of think tanks with a male leader showed a similar increase in the number of staff. However, more think tanks with male leaders (22%) had a stable number of staff or no change in staff size, while female-led think tanks (40%) showed a greater decline in number of staff. These figures should be assessed with caution due to the greater share of think tanks that have a male leader (523, 72%) than those with a female leader (183, 25%).

Table 12.

Staff change (%), 2019 to 2021 (by gender of leader, 2021)				
	Both male and female	Female	Male	Total
< 0% (decrease)	28%	40%	31%	33%
No change	32%	14%	22%	20%
1–25%	28%	27%	32%	31%
26–50%	12%	9%	9%	9%
50% and above	0%	9%	7%	3%
n:	25	183	523	731

12

Gender and leadership

Questions answered in this chapter:

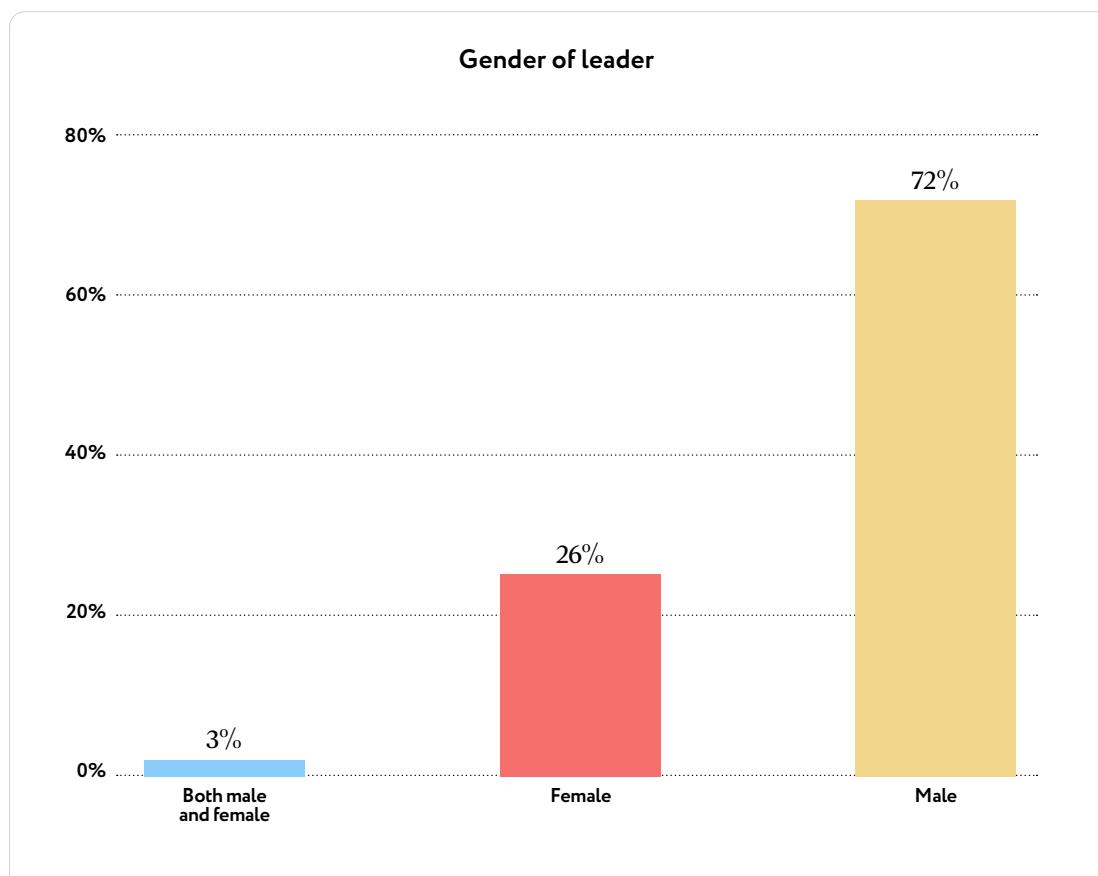
- How many men and women lead think tanks?
- How does this differ by region?
- Are female-founded think tanks more likely to be led by women?

Gender and leadership

How many men and women lead think tanks?

The data on leadership take account of the role that each organisation identifies as being the overall leader, and this position can take many names: president, chairperson, director, chief executive officer, secretary general, etc. Think tank leadership around the world is dominated by men (72%), which is almost three times the percentage of think tanks led by women (26%) (Chart 25).

Chart 25.

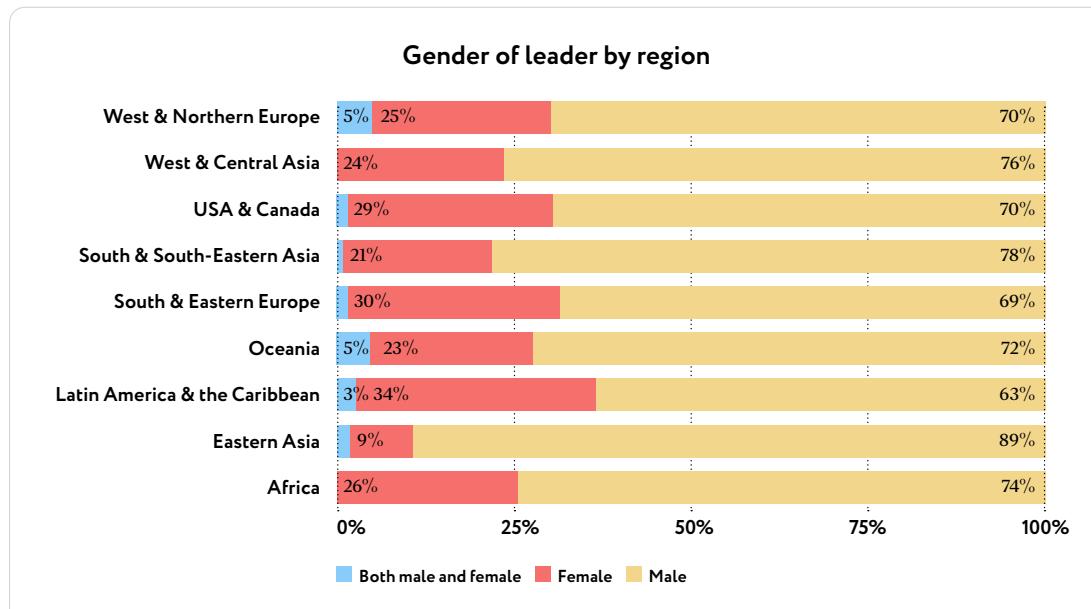


n: 2,621

Differences

Throughout the world, think tanks are predominantly led by men, but differences emerge by region (Chart 26). The percentage of think tanks with women leaders is highest in the Americas – Latin America & the Caribbean (34%), South & Eastern Europe (30%) and USA & Canada (29%). Eastern Asia has the smallest share of think tanks with female leadership (9%), while in other regions at least a fifth of think tanks are women-led.

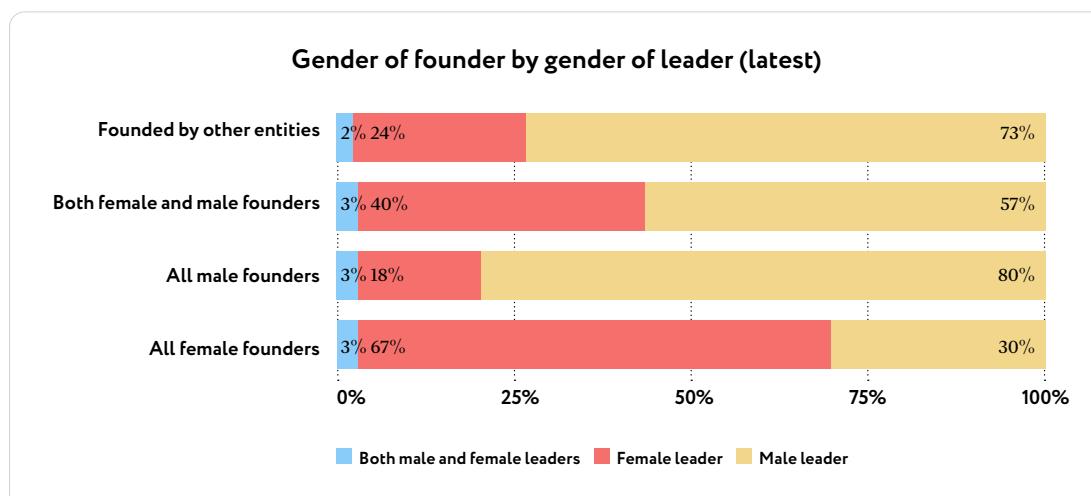
Chart 26.



n: 2,624

Chart 27 shows that think tanks founded by females tend to have more female leadership (67%), while think tanks founded by males have primarily male leaders (80%). Think tanks founded by both male and female co-founders and by other entities have more male leaders than female: 57% and 73%, respectively.

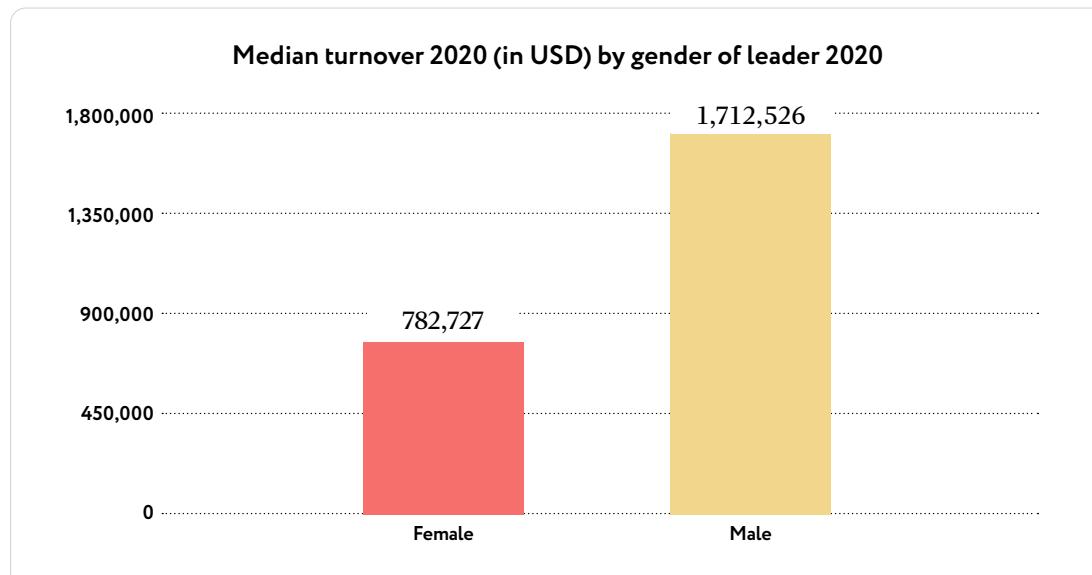
Chart 27.



n: 1,470

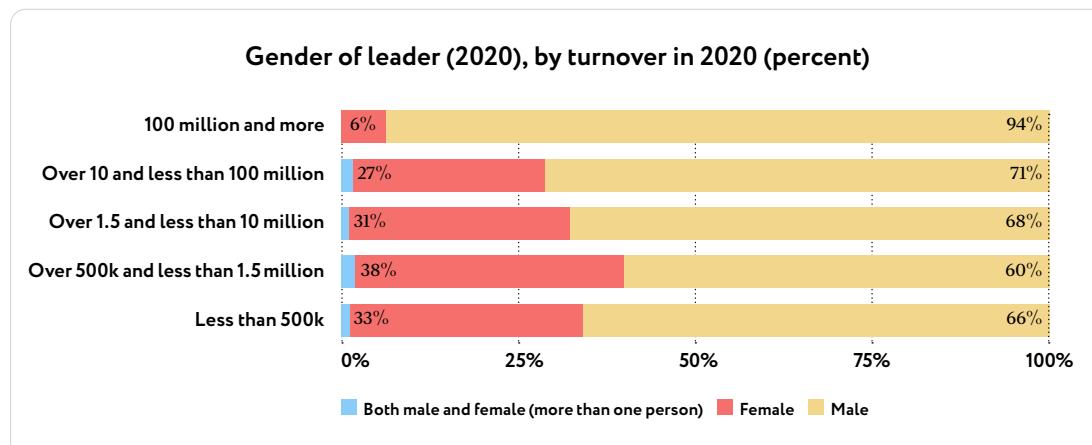
As in the 2019 report, male-led think tanks had double the turnover in 2020 than think tanks led by females (Chart 28). A closer look at turnover (Chart 29) shows that only 6% of think tanks with a turnover of USD 100 million or more are led by women, and a higher percentage of think tanks with a turnover of less than USD 1.5 million (38%) are led by women compared to other turnover brackets.

Chart 28.



n:266

Chart 29.



n:266

What has changed since 2019?

There has not been much change in the gender of leadership of think tanks in the past three years. Think tanks continue to be dominated by male leaders and their turnover remains higher than think tanks with female leadership.

Table 13.

Gender of leader by year			
	2019	2020	2021
Both male and female	3%	3%	3%
Female	22%	22%	23%
Male	75%	75%	75%

13

Social media use

Questions answered in this chapter:

- Which social media channels are think tanks more predominantly engaged with?
- Which social media channels are more popular by region?

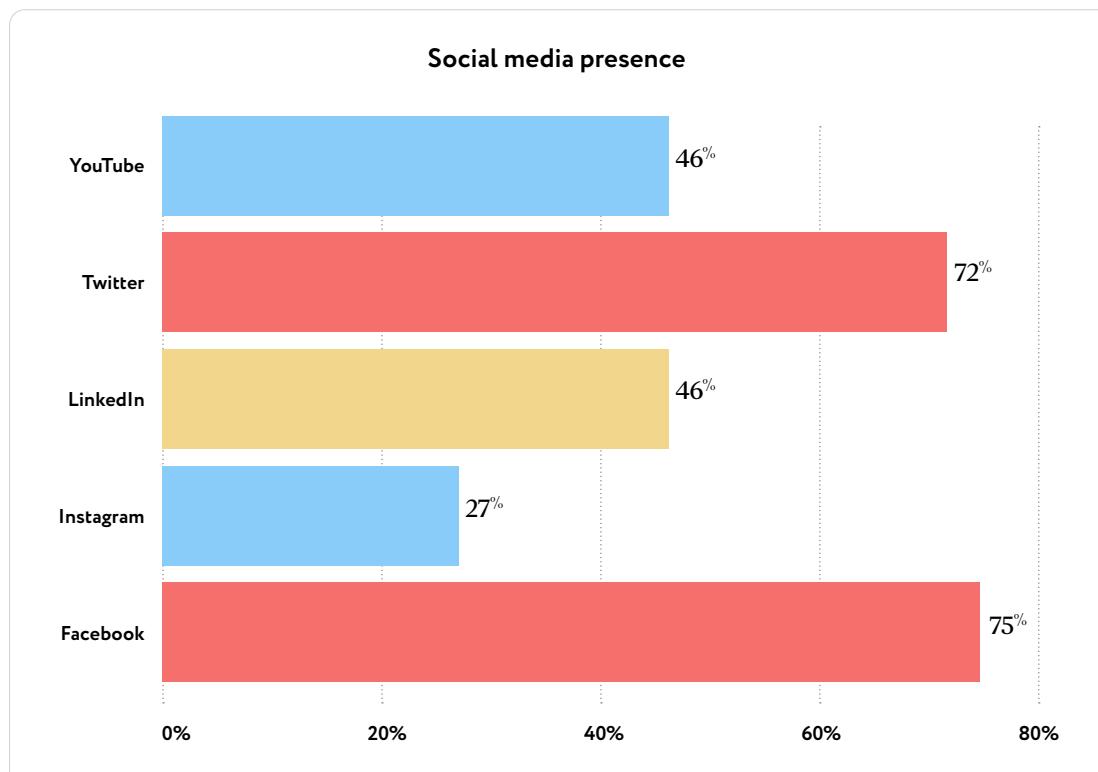
Social media use

Which channels do think tanks use?

The Open Think Tank Directory registers an organisation's presence²⁴ on the following social media channels: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram, as well as the number of followers or likes on each channel. To identify the social media channels that organisations use we scraped²⁵ think tanks websites and registered whether they publicly shared accounts on these channels on their websites, and we are confident that the results present a representative picture of the reality for these social media channels.²⁶ However, we acknowledge that think tanks, especially in Asia, use other social media channels that we are not registering.

The social media channels that feature most prominently in the directory are Facebook (75% of organisations have an account registered) and Twitter (72%), followed by YouTube (46%), LinkedIn (46%) and Instagram(27%) (Chart 30).

Chart 30.



n: YouTube 1,435, Twitter 2,222, LinkedIn 1,420, Instagram 574, Facebook, 2,319

²⁴ Social media channels need to exclusively belong to the organisation to be registered. For example, if a university centre uses the university's social media accounts, then it is not counted.

²⁵ Overton was contracted to do the data scraping. Data scraping refers to the process of importing information from a website to a spreadsheet or local file saved on a computer.

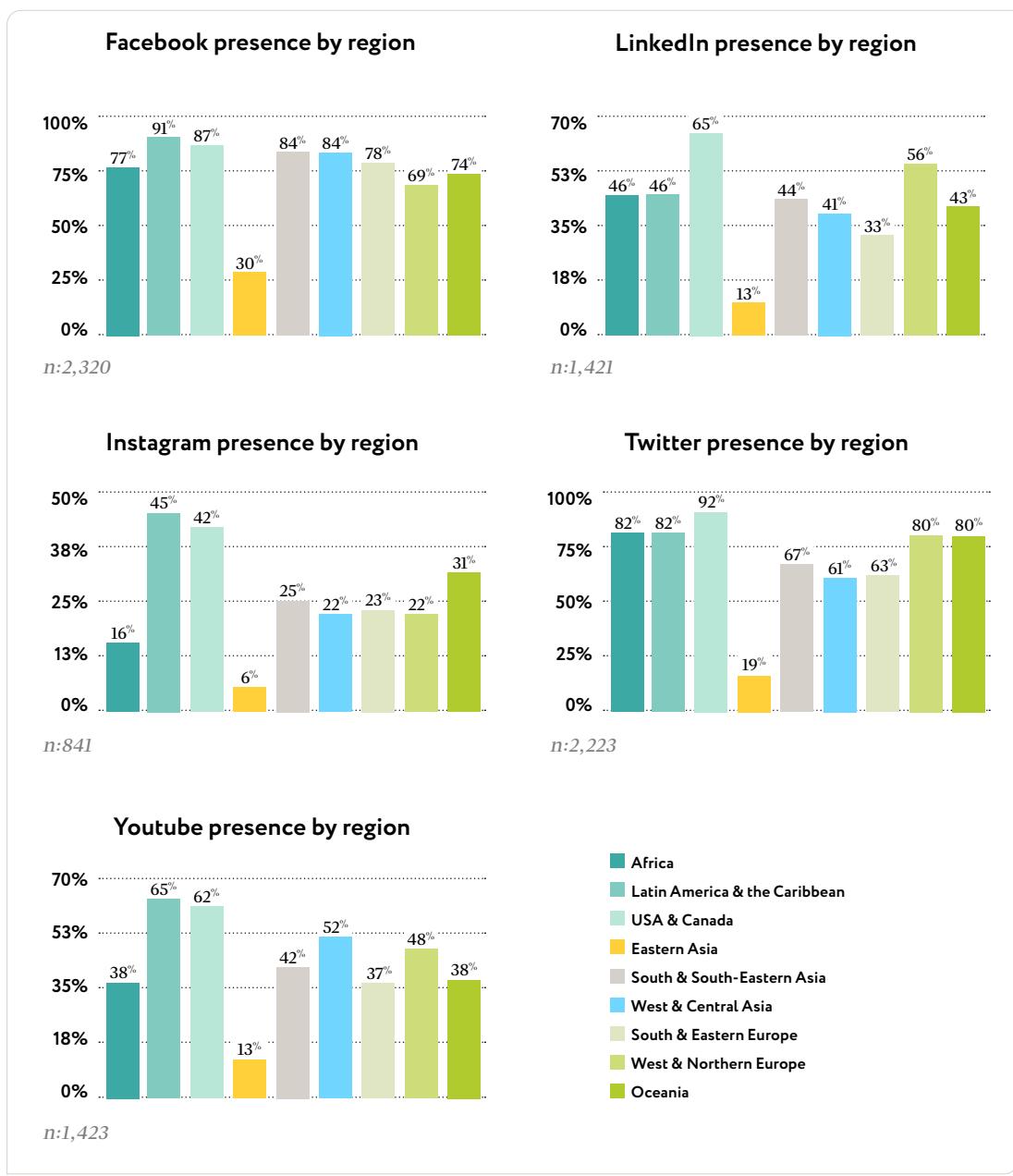
²⁶ With the exception of followers on LinkedIn as the platform actively discourages scraping.

Differences

Overall, Facebook and Twitter are the think tanks' most used social media apps while Instagram has the lowest presence among think tanks. This is consistent with the trends observed in each region (Chart 31).

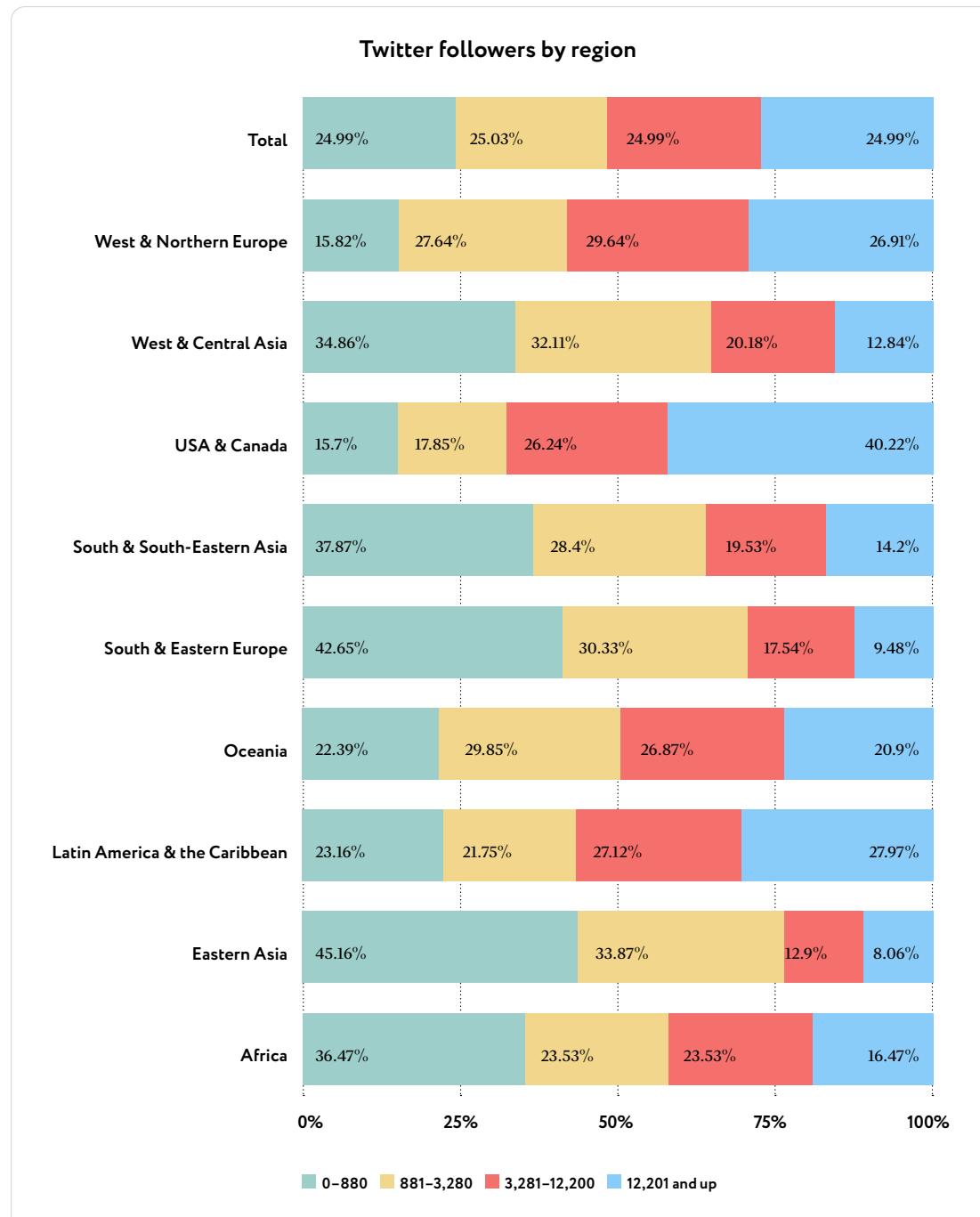
Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are most common among think tanks in the Americas (Latin America & the Caribbean and USA & Canada). LinkedIn is most common in USA & Canada (65%) and West & Northern Europe (56%); Twitter is most common in USA & Canada (92%), Latin America & the Caribbean (82%) and Africa (82%). Eastern Asia appears to have the lowest number of think tanks that use social media.

Chart 31.



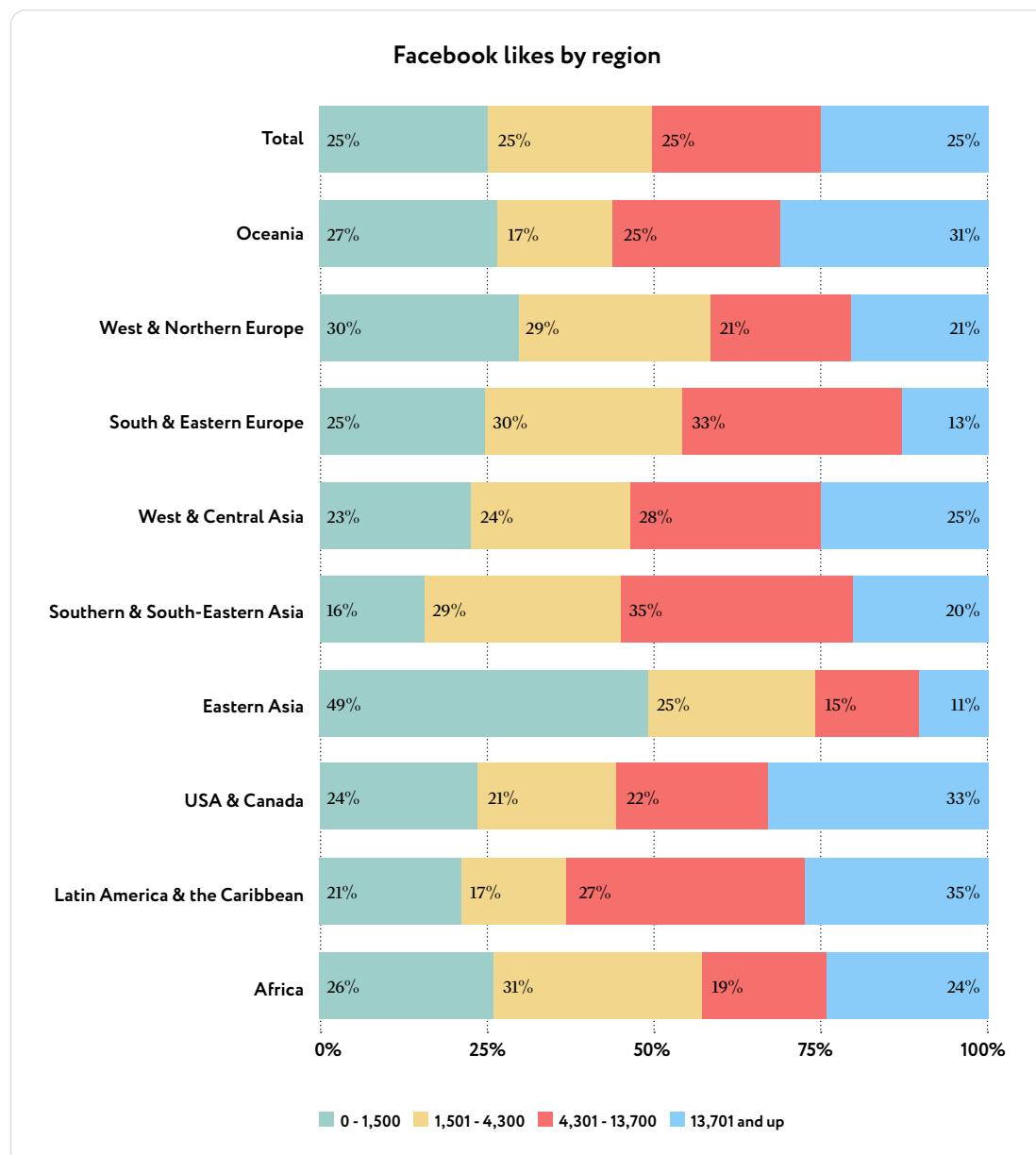
With Eastern Asia having the lowest number of think tanks present on the social media registered it is no surprise that it also has think tanks with the smallest number of followers, with only 21% of think tanks having more than 3,280 followers. Moreover, Asia in general had the most Twitter accounts with the lowest number of followers. The Americas have the greatest number of think tanks with more than 3,280 followers.

Chart 32.



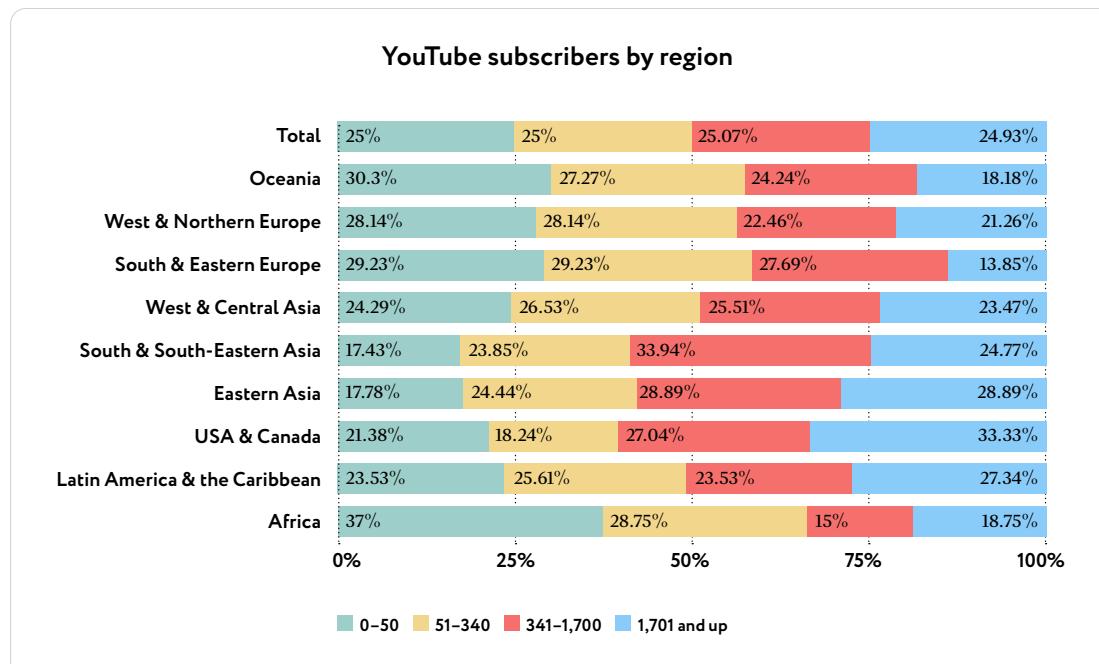
Oceania and Latin America & the Caribbean have the greatest number of think tanks with more than 4,300 Facebook likes, more than the world average. Eastern Asia has the greatest number of think tanks with the smallest number of followers (up to 4,300) at 74%. Latin America & the Caribbean (35%), USA & Canada (33%) and Oceania (31%) have the biggest share of think tanks with 13,701 or more followers in their respective regions.

Chart 33.



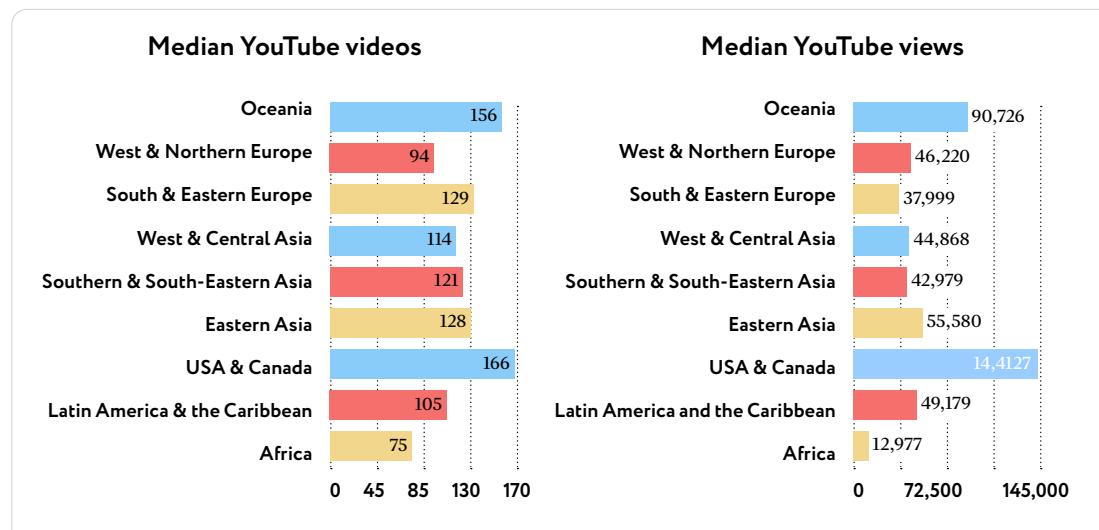
The Americas continue to dominate the number of YouTube subscribers, with about a third of think tanks in USA & Canada (33%) and in Latin America & the Caribbean (27%) having 1,701 or more YouTube subscribers. On the other hand, Africa has the greatest share of think tanks with up to 50 (38%) and 51–340 followers (29%).

Chart 34.



Despite Latin America & the Caribbean having the greatest share of think tanks with YouTube accounts, it does not have the highest median number of YouTube videos as it only has a median of 105, which is the third lowest median number of YouTube videos. USA & Canada has the highest median number of YouTube videos (166), followed by Oceania (156). Consistently, USA & Canada and Oceania have the highest median number of YouTube views at 144,127 and 90,726, respectively.

Chart 35.





The Open Think Tank Directory

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