

**DEMOCRACY STUDIES IN LATIN AMERICA**  
**Institutions, Research Centers and Context**

**A Subjective Selection:  
U.S.-Based Institutions that Work on  
Democratic Consolidation in Latin America**

Maria A. Lotito



2008

This paper is part of a project to gather information about the main institutions, centers and scholars doing research and working on issues related to democracy in Latin America. It was carried out in 2006 by the Edelstein Center for Social Research under the coordination of Bernardo Sorj, with support from the *Open Society Institute*. Its main purpose was to develop a data basis for the creation of the Plataforma Democrática project ([www.plataformademocratica.org.br](http://www.plataformademocratica.org.br)). The data and opinions presented here are the author's responsibility, and do not necessarily express the views of the institutions associated to the project.

ISBN: 978-85-99662-44-1

Copyright ©: Centro Edelstein. 2008. Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.

The text, in part or in the whole, may be copied for non-commercial purposes in the terms of the Creative Commons 2.5 license.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/deed.en>



# **A Subjective Selection: U.S.-Based Institutions that Work on Democratic Consolidation in Latin America<sup>1</sup>**

Maria A. Lotito<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction:**

Several scholars have devoted meticulous attention to the realm of think tanks in the United States, detailing their evolution over time and assessing their structure and influence. But, studies examining think tanks on the basis of their specific regional and policy foci are less common. This report seeks not only to map the field of think tanks and research institutions that are engaged specifically in the field of *democratization* as a research and advocacy focus, but also further delimits the selection of such institutions to those that center their work on *Latin America*. As one report of the many prepared for the Edelstein Center's Forum Agenda Latin America (FALA), the United States' field of think tanks is characterized by various types of institutions that over a long history have adopted diverse objectives, financial foundations, institutional structures and methods of influencing public policy.

The definition of a think tank is subject to variation depending on what one views as the most important function of the institution. Wiarda's definition is straightforward and by nature of its generality seems to be the most inclusive definition. He believes that think tanks are "*research organizations that have as their primary purpose public policy analysis and influence [emphasis in original]*" (Wiarda 1995). For the purposes of this

---

<sup>1</sup> Prepared for the Edelstein Center for Social Research, for the FORUM AGENDA LATINOAMERICA (FALA), March 2007

<sup>2</sup> [mal2161@columbia.edu](mailto:mal2161@columbia.edu)

study, however, our definition differs slightly. I compiled a database of institutions with *an academic orientation that increase awareness of the challenges of democratic consolidation and citizenship participation in Latin America with the objective of influencing political and social actors*. In the case of the United States, I am admittedly broad in the inclusion of organizations that cover a wide spectrum. For example, I include the few institutions that are heavily involved in promoting democratization in Latin America, but may not necessarily count *research* as their main function. These types of organizations are classified by Abelson as Advocacy Think Tanks that attempt to influence policy more through policy reports and media exposure, rather than traditional research.

According to the definitions above, 47 U.S.-based institutions qualify for this study. The database I composed was reviewed by well-informed colleagues in the field, after which, a survey was sent to all via e-mail. The surveys solicited general information on each organization's activities, personnel figures, current projects and financial resources.<sup>3</sup> Of note is that some of the most prominent think tanks in the U.S. declined to participate, claiming that their treatment of Latin America and the state of its democratic consolidation is minimal, and they currently devote resources toward more hot-button issues. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Heritage Foundation, and the Rand Corporation, three of the most influential think tanks in the nation, fall into this category.

---

<sup>3</sup> I would like to sincerely thank Chris Sabatini of the Americas Society/Council of the Americas and Paul Thurman of Columbia University for their comments on the methodology and drafts of this study. Also, thank you to Tom Trebat of Columbia University, Art Kaufmann and Melissa Aten of the National Endowment of Democracy, and James McGann for their comments and advice.

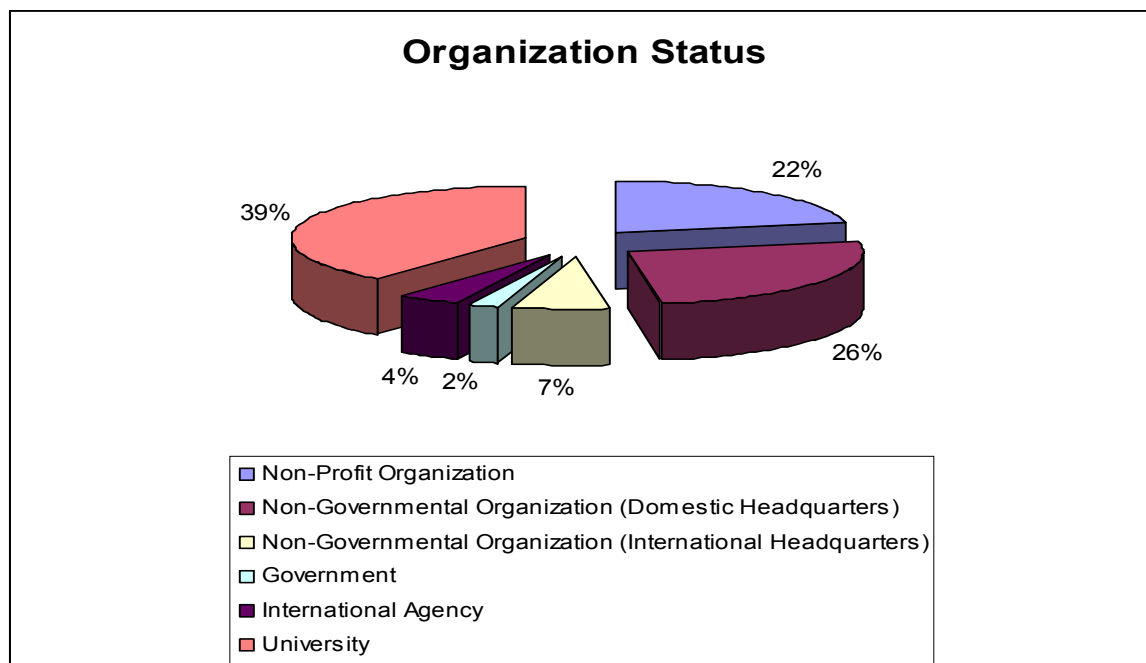
Admittedly, survey responses were difficult to obtain. In the event that after two weeks, the institution did not respond, I filled out the form with publicly available information, and then resubmitted the partially completed forms to the non-responding organization for approval and amendment. In these cases, several organizations responded with revisions and additions to the surveys, which I then included in the study. Over the course of three months, after several rounds of follow-up phone calls and email, a total of 37 institutions responded with the requested information resulting in a 79% response rate. The study was constrained by the inability of the institutions to devote ample time to completing the survey. In some cases information was left blank; especially on questions that sought commentary on the challenges the organization faced with respect to finances, government relations and awareness building among policymakers.

### **The Think-tanks**

The classifications of the selected think tanks cover a wide spectrum.<sup>4</sup> The chart below details the proportions of organizations that fall into each category given on the survey.

---

<sup>4</sup> Think tanks that qualified for the study could be: independent, nonprofit research centers; nongovernmental organizations; governments; international agencies or intergovernmental organizations; universities; political parties; syndicates; professional associations and corporations; and churches.



**Figure 1: Graph accounts for all qualifying institutions (47), not only those that responded to the survey**

While structurally, these organizations are given names such as “nonprofit organizations,” or “Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO),” they can be further described by their relationships with other organizations, and their position in society. James McGann has noted that U.S. institutions differ in their roles in U.S. society, and to whom the organization shows loyalty. He argues that think tanks can further be classified into the following categories:

- **Autonomous and independent** – Significant independence from any one interest group or donor and autonomous in its operation and funding from the government
- **Quasi independent** – Autonomous from government but controlled by an interest group, donor or contracting agency that provides a majority of the funding and has significant influence over operations of the think tank
- **University affiliated** – A policy research center at a university
- **Political Party affiliated** – Formally affiliated with a political party
- **Government affiliated** – A part of the structure of government

- **Quasi governmental** – Funded exclusively by government grants and contracts

Autonomous and independent	AS/COA; Brookings Institute; CFR; CIP; CSIS; DPLF; HRW - Americas; IRC; NACLA; Resource Center on the Americas.org; Freedom House; VICS; WOLA; Woodrow Wilson Center
Quasi Independent	Solidarity Center
University Affiliated	Carter Center – Emory University; ILAS - Columbia University; DRCLAS - Harvard University; LACC - FIU; CLAS - Georgetown University; LAPOP - Vanderbilt; LLILAS University of Texas, Austin; The Hoover Institution; The MacMillan Center; The Watson Institute;

but not a part of the formal structure of government (McGann, Johnson 2005)

	CLAS - UCB; LAC-UCLA; CILAS - UCSD; CHP - UM; LAII - UNM; Kellogg Institute; CLAS - University of Chicago; ILAS - UNC; CLAS - University of Pittsburgh; WPI – The New School
Political Party Affiliated	NDI
Government Affiliated	IAF; OAS - UPD; UNDP; USIP; WBI – Governance and Anti-Corruption
Quasi Governmental	CIPE; IAD; IADB; IRI; NED - IFDS

**Table 1: This table includes all of the organizations that qualified for this study (47), not only those that responded to the survey**

### **Political Context**

Politically, the United States provides fertile ground for think tanks to flourish. William Wallace, in agreement with other prominent scholars in this field, explains that the liberal nature of American politics and the separation of governmental power create a uniquely amenable environment for a marketplace of ideas. The contemporary United States political environment forces policy advocates to aggressively compete for influence among the dispersed levels of governmental decision making power (Hill and Beshoff 1994). Additionally, think tanks often provide a way for policymakers to get fast, expert opinions from a private institution when the work of governmental research bodies gets held up in an elaborate bureaucracy (Wiarda 1995).

Yet, this highly competitive environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has not always existed. In fact, the U.S. think tank industry has evolved substantially since the establishment of what Abelson cites as the first organization resembling a think tank, the Chicago Civic Federation, which was created as far back as 1894 (Abelson 1996). A century ago think tanks were few and well-endowed, as opposed to ubiquitous and specialized (more on this below). In fact, the high powered think tanks created during the

first 20 years of the twentieth century comprise today's most influential research institutions. Of these older institutions,<sup>5</sup> the Brookings Institute, the Hoover Institution and the Council on Foreign Relations contribute to the field of democratization in Latin America today.

Following the U.S. civil rights movement and the anti-war protests of the 1960s, think tanks in the U.S. departed from their original mission to “work hand in hand with government” and began to objectively provide government-based solutions to public problems (Rich 2004). Andrew Rich argues that during this period, Americans began to lose faith in their government as a vehicle for social change. At that point, think tanks began to adopt ideological and political inclinations. More specifically, the 1970s marked the rise of a relatively large number of conservative think tanks that flourished, in Rich's view, for four reasons: the political mobilization of corporate interests, the rise of neo-conservatism, the mobilization of fundamental Christianity, and the coming of age of supply side economics.

In the 1980s, James Allen Smith says that this rise of right-wing institutions was met by a reciprocal rise of left-wing groups. Throughout the decade, think tanks markedly took on more specialized research interests, which was also a way of increasing an organization's chances for success in a field with more and more players. He even offers a sociological explanation for this phenomenon, arguing that Americans have an abnormal preoccupation with expertise and insist on bringing it to bear on policymaking (Smith 1991). Regardless of these lines of reasoning, large think tanks with broad policy

---

<sup>5</sup> Abelson points to the following organizations as the pioneers of the modern think tank: Russell Sage Foundation (1907), the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1910), the Institute for Government Research, later to become the Brookings Institute (1916), the Hoover Institution (1919) and the Council on Foreign Relations (1921).

concentrations staffed by “autonomous intellectuals” have over the course of the twentieth century given way to specialized research institutions and “academic specialists.” It is in this environment that American think tanks began to take note of democratic consolidation in Latin America.

Today’s think tanks that address democratization issues in Latin America have diverse levels of interaction with governments. Those that responded to this section of the survey generally reported very positive relations with domestic governments and governments in Latin America (AS/COA, CSIS, CIPE). Yet, some of the principal challenges that surfaced in governmental relations were: declining budgetary allocations (ILAS - UNC), restriction from research in Cuba (DRCLAS – Harvard University), difficulty connecting with upcoming Latin American leaders (IAD), small permanent staff size that does not allow the organization to take on government contracts (LLILAS - University of Texas, Austin) and maintaining the fine line between independence and government affiliation (Carter Center - Emory University).

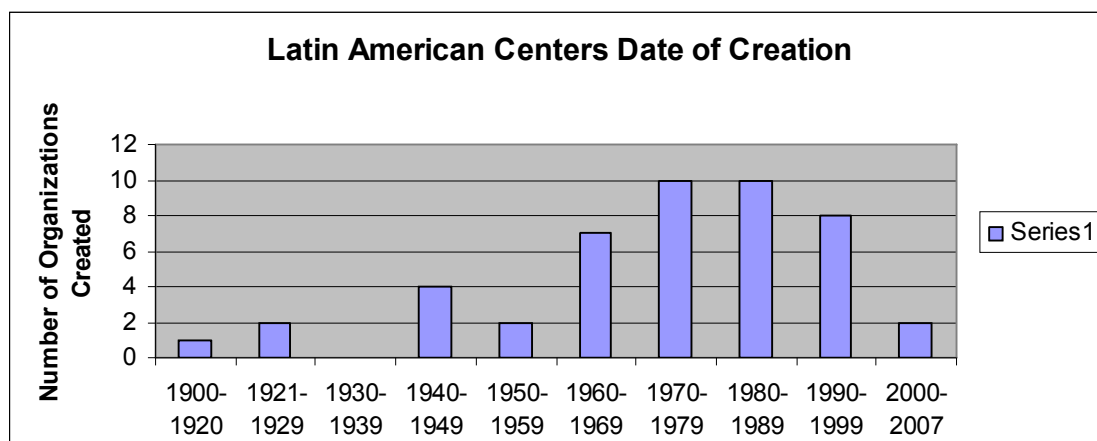
### **The Latin America Camp**

The early twentieth century saw the creation of very few think tanks that devoted attention to Latin America. Over the course of the century the number steadily grew, peaking in the 1980s. Only one center that works on Latin America was created before 1920, and two between 1920 and 1939. Between 1940 and 1959, before the flood of American aid and military intervention in Latin America, five centers devoted to Latin America were created. This period also precedes the general boom of think tanks in the U.S. Seven centers were created in the 1960s, and an additional nine during the 1970s. The heyday of think tanks continued in the 80s and 90s when ten and nine were created,

respectively. Over the first seven years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two have been established. In this section, the dates of creation for the University of California, Berkeley's Center for Latin American Studies and the University of New Mexico's Latin American and Iberian Institute were excluded because of unavailable data.

1911-1919	The Hoover Institution
1920-1929	Brookings Institute; CFR
1930-1939	
1940-1949	LLILAS - University of Texas, Austin; The Freedom House; ILAS - UNC
1950-1959	CLAS - Georgetown University; LAC - UCLA
1960-1969	AS/COA; ILAS - Columbia University; CSIS; IAF; NACLA; CLAS - University of Chicago; CLAS - University of Pittsburgh
1970-1979	CIP; HRW - Americas; LAPOP - Vanderbilt University; CILAS - UCSD; WOLA; COHA; LACC - FIU; Woodrow Wilson Center; UNDP
1980-1989	Carter Center – Emory University; CIPE; IAD; IRI; USIP; Resource Center on the Americas.org; Kellogg Institute; NDI; The Watson Institute; The MacMillan Center
1990-1999	DRCLAS – Harvard University; DPLF; IADB; NED - IFDS; OAS-UPD; Solidarity Center; VICS; WBI – Governance and Anti Corruption; WPI – The New School
2000-2007	CHP - UM; IRC

These figures are in line with McGann's data that think tanks in the United States have grown rapidly over the past thirty years in comparison with the pre-Vietnam War era. Referring to think tanks nationwide, he cites that 58% of think tanks have been established in the past 20 years and 90% were created after 1951. The think tanks that were created after 1970 are generally unique in their tendency to be specialized, niche institutions (McGann 2006).



**Figure 2: Graph includes all institutions, except for CLAS – UCB and LAII – UNM, a total of 45 organizations**

### **Democratization as U.S. Foreign Policy**

When President Ronald Reagan gave his famous address to the British parliament in 1982, his words heralded a new era of U.S. foreign assistance policy. He called for a policy that went beyond financial aid for development and the protection of human rights in the third world, and toward an explicit national commitment to promote democratic development abroad. “The objective I propose is quite simple to state: to foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, [and] universities, which [will allow] a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means.”

In its essence, the democracy movement in the United States reaches back to President Woodrow Wilson who sought to “make the world safe for democracy.” President John F. Kennedy also imprinted the democratization movement by creating the Alliance for Progress and focusing efforts in the 1960s on obstructing the rise of authoritarianism in Latin America. The Carter administration’s blanket approach to the

promotion of human rights has also been considered a form of democracy promotion, but falls short of the strong association with democratization achieved by Reagan.

Wiarda notes that the Reagan administration distinguished itself by remedying the chasm between human rights promotion and U.S. national security interests—a flaw that impeded Carter’s policies from garnering more widespread support. Reagan argued that through establishing democracies abroad, the United States could meld all of the following into one concise policy: national security interests, efforts to improve the image of the U.S. abroad, and human rights considerations. In the early years of democratization, the United States posited itself as an advocate of world peace, while at the same time working toward stemming terrorism and detracting from the Soviet Union’s base of support. Throughout the 1980s, democratization as a foreign policy enjoyed support from the public, the media and diverse branches of government (Wiarda 1995). In retrospect, however, some scholars such as Howard Wiarda view that time period as merely a foreign policy experiment where the U.S. treated other nations as “foreign policy laboratories,” to see how democratization policies played out in real time (Wiarda 1987).

### **Size/Activities**

After the Nicaraguan elections in 1990 and the signing of the peace accords in El Salvador in 1992, Latin America disappeared from American headlines and also from the priority lists of American policymakers (Wiarda 1995). Especially since September 11<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent war on terror, Latin America has become little more than a foreign policy after-thought. As a result, research programs dealing with Latin America saw their budgets contract and their staff size cut. Throughout the 1990s, those centers that

worked on Latin America consisted of one or two people and a cadre of student interns. This trend seems to continue through today with little improvement. In fact, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Heritage Foundation, two of the most well-known research organizations, currently have no experts working on Latin American issues, let alone democratic consolidation in the region.

In our survey, participants were reluctant to provide information regarding staff size. Stone's arguments that in-house researchers are becoming rare because of cost concerns, and that think-tanks see substantial staff fluctuations, explain how these numbers are difficult to obtain given frequently changing data (Stone 1996). Also, visiting scholars and independent contributors make staff size a perpetual uncertainty. Among the surveyed organizations, the number of senior researchers working on democratization in Latin America varies widely from organization to organization.<sup>6</sup> When asked about the number of senior researchers in the unit that concentrates on Latin America, eight of the 37 organizations did not respond. Of the 29 organizations for which data is available, 15 or 53% have fewer than five senior staff members working on democracy issues Latin America. Only nine or 31% of the organizations had between five and 10 senior researchers and the remaining five (17%) had more than 10 senior researchers. Still these numbers cannot claim that these senior researchers devote themselves exclusively to Latin American democracy issues.

Overall staff figures, particularly for U.S. government-funded advocacy organizations with offices in all regions of the world, were quite large. Of note were the International Republican Institute, that has a staff of 250 and the United States Institute of Peace that has 120 staff members. CIPE has a staff of about 70 people. These three

---

<sup>6</sup> We define *senior researcher* as someone with an established reputation in the scientific field

bodies promote democracy globally, which explains such large staff sizes. Those organizations with smaller staff sizes of fewer than five members constitute nine out of 22 responding organizations, or 41% of the sample. Only five, or 23%, had between five and 10 staff members. Interestingly and perhaps a nod to Stone's conclusions, 13 organizations chose not to comment questions pertaining to staff size.

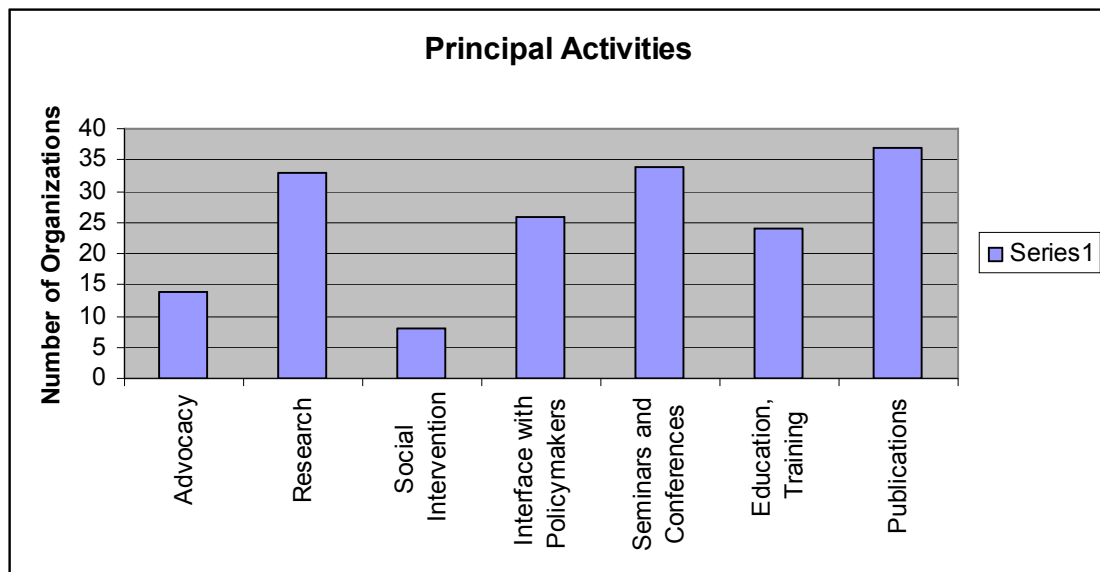
When asked about affiliated researchers, participants were even less inclined to respond; 18 institutions offered no comment. However, of those that did, we see that these institutions do, in fact, depend on affiliated researchers on both large and small scales. Institutions were asked to comment on the staff directly involved in the center or unit devoted to Latin America, but since many organizations see significant inter-departmental overlap and sharing of scholars, these numbers are difficult to interpret. My results show that nineteen of the 37 total responding institutions either claimed to have zero affiliated researchers, or offered no comment. Eight of the 20 organizations that responded rely on one to 10 affiliated researchers, only one organization uses between 10 and 30 affiliated researchers, and four organizations use between 30 and 50. The four institutes that employ more than 70 affiliated researchers perhaps provides grounding for Stone's argument that researchers are increasingly employed remotely to defray costs (Stone 1996).

All of the organizations that responded to the survey answered the section inquiring their principal activities.<sup>7</sup> Of the given options, the production of publications is the most common activity, claimed by all 37 organizations. Delving a little deeper, the survey requested that each organization list both periodicals (annual reports, newsletters,

---

<sup>7</sup> Organizations were asked to indicate which of the following activities they carry out: Advocacy, Research, Social Intervention Projects, Interface with Policymakers, Seminars and Conferences, Education, Training and Capacity Building, and Publications.

and journals) and self-standing publications (such as policy reports, books and academic articles). Five of the 37 organizations declined to distinguish between types of publications. Yet, of the 32 organizations that commented and differentiated between periodicals and self-standing publications, 24 organizations claim to publish periodicals (75%) and 27 contribute self-standing publications (84%).



Holding seminars and/or conferences is the second most common activity among the surveyed organizations, as 34 of the 37 (92%) organizations claim that these types of events are among their principal functions. The third most prominent activity is research, which 33 of the 37, or 89% of the organizations conducted. This figure, in a study that chose not to involve advocacy institutions would surely be 100% because a think tank is typically thought to revolve around research. However, U.S. based institutes exist in a unique national context. The organizations of this study that do not consider research a principal function (Carter Center – Emory University, CIPE, IAF, Solidarity Center) are

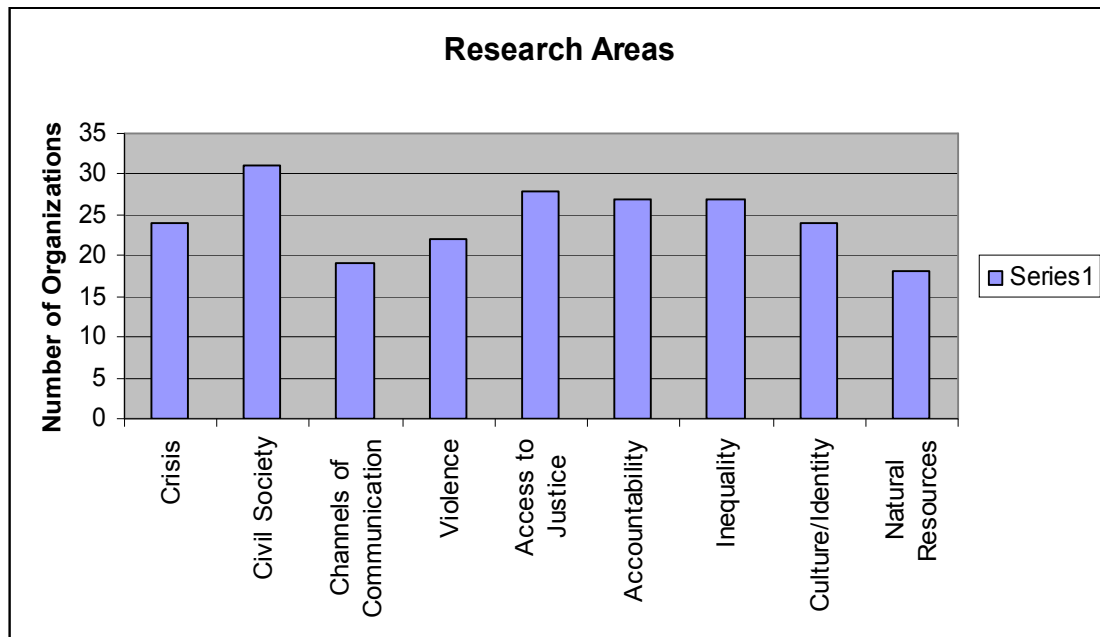
still closely involved in democratic development in the region, yet focus more on programmatic activities such as policy advocacy and capacity building. They do, however, publish papers and conduct incipient research in the field, thereby contributing the understanding of democratic development in Latin America through diverse means. Upon this basis, I decided that these organizations should be mentioned when mapping this field.

A large amount of organizations engage in interface with public officials, involving 26 of the 37 organizations. The next most common activity is education, which 24 organizations (65%) claim as a main function, referring to education carried out on the ground in the region, or at home in U.S. based universities. Less prominent activities are advocacy (38%) and social intervention projects (22%).

The research areas of each organization tend to be very broad and inclusive of several aspects of social science, not usually claiming any one area as a specialty. Civil Society as a research topic receives the most attention among institutions engaged in Latin American issues,<sup>8</sup> earning the attention of 30 of the 33 organizations that conduct original research (94%). Following Civil Society, the second most common research area is Access to Justice and Protection of Human Rights, which draws the attention of 85% or 28 organizations. Data for the other surveyed research areas are detailed in the graph below.

---

<sup>8</sup> Research areas inquired about were: Crisis and restructuring of political institutions (parties, parliament, government, political regime); Civil society/new forms of citizen participation, new actors and social movements; New channels of communication, formation of public opinion and emergence of new public space; Violence, criminality, drug-trafficking and its impact on democratic institutions, Access to justice and protection of human rights; Accountability/Corruption/Transparency; Social inequality, poverty and democracy (its impact on democratic consolidation and social exclusion, the informal sector and compensatory politics); Culture, collective identities and Democracy; Natural resources and their impact on internal and external politics.



## Finances

Many organizations were reluctant to comment on their financial resources and budgetary information. This area is indeed quite sensitive for think tanks and most other nonprofits that exist in a capricious financial environment. In recent years, think tanks and research centers have seen significant change in donation trends. A study done in 2004 by McGann suggests that funding is now more short-term and project-specific. Positive repercussions of this trend, McGann believes, include higher efficiency of think

tanks and a stronger focus on disseminating information. On the other hand, McGann argues this method of funding can cause organizations to deviate from their original missions, limit the depth of analysis and innovation, and can influence their products. Also, transient funding can hinder an organization's ability to attract the best scholars. In a globalized world, competition among smaller, more niche think tanks has become fierce, with money going to the institution that best accommodates the specific objectives of donors (McGann 2004).

The trend of short-term, project-specific funding for think tanks stems in part from the evolution of American foundations, which are a tremendous source of funding for think tanks. According to Randall Holcombe, newer foundations founded since the 1980s tend to be smaller and more ideologically driven than the larger, older institutions and because of this, are more likely to fund the short-term specialized projects mentioned above (Holcombe 2000).

The United States government is also a substantial source of funding for organizations carrying out work on democratization in Latin America. The United States has extensive programs to fund international democracy building, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, created by United States congress in December 1983. The NED has seen their budget grow from \$18 to \$30 million over its quarter-century lifespan (Carothers 1999). As of 2003, the NED budget surpassed \$50 million, taking into account special congressional initiatives in addition to its core budgetary allocation. The CIPE, Solidarity Center and IRI are all beneficiaries of this government program and are all active in promoting democratic consolidation in Latin America.

The United States government also provides significant funding for university research centers that classify as National Resource Centers. Under section 601 Part A of the Higher Education Act that was reauthorized by Congress in 1998, institutions of higher education qualify for federal funding if they are deemed to promote knowledge of world regions, foreign language and international affairs. In 2006, the United States government allocated an estimated \$28,620,000 to institutions of higher education that fit the above mentioned criterion.<sup>9</sup> These recipients receive awards averaging \$238,500. Several such National Resource Centers are active contributors to the field of democratic development in Latin America, such as:<sup>10</sup>

- Columbia & Georgetown University Consortium
- David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (Harvard University)
- University of California at Berkeley, CLAS
- University of California at Los Angeles, LAC
- University of New Mexico, New Mexico Consortium in Latin American Studies
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill & Duke University
- University of Pittsburgh CLAS (Cooperation with Cornell University)
- University of Texas, Austin, LLILAS
- Vanderbilt University

Despite prolific foundation and government funds in the United States, the centers surveyed for this study experience significant difficulty in securing necessary funding. The most common complaint of these organizations is the lack of funds available to support overhead costs. Institutions such as the DRCLAS – Harvard University, DPLF, Inter-American Dialogue, CSIS, CLAS - University of Pittsburgh, WOLA, NACLA and the LLILAS - University of Texas, Austin all shared this complaint. Referred to both as “unrestricted funding” and “core funding” these terms were both used to imply that

---

<sup>9</sup> See Department of Education Website: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/iegps/title-six.html>

<sup>10</sup> For report on Department of Education award recipients, see: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/iegps/nrcflas-ca-la.pdf>

donors today are more interested in seeing direct results of their contributions rather than supporting the general existence of these organizations.

Also striking was the Carter Center - Emory University's mention that "International donors are becoming increasingly interested in direct budgetary support to governments and funding either through contracts (ex. USAID) or to local NGOs, rather than international non-governmental organizations." This seems to be in line with the general shift among policy institutions to directly support indigenous organizations over U.S. based offices operating remotely. Encouraging democracy through the support of on-site organizations staffed by locals is not only more cost efficient, but also is a way to provide new sources of employment and demonstrate cultural sensitivity.

Funding restrictions also inhibit the ability of several organizations to disseminate awareness to policymakers. In order for the work of the organization to be seen by decision makers, they must provide their publications and papers free of charge (unless specifically commissioned for a specific paper/report). Organizations such as the IRC, DPLF and NACLA stated that the material costs of distributing information to policymakers is a fundamental budgetary challenge that could be solved if the organization had more resources.

In total, 22 think tanks provided budgetary information for this survey. Among these 22 organizations, nine were Latin American research centers located in universities. The average annual budget for these centers was \$1,616,667. Of the 13 other types of organizations (that included nonprofits, NGOs with international and domestic headquarters, and government agencies) the average budget for the organizations' activities and programs in Latin America was \$3,420,385. However, the United States

Institute of Peace has a relatively large budget of over \$22 million that skewed the results. When excluding this figure, the average budget shrinks by half to become \$1,866,667 million.

On the survey, the organizations were asked to comment the sources of their income by ranking them in importance from 1-8. Four organizations declined to comment on this section of the survey. Fourteen of the 33 (43%) organizations who responded to this section stated that their most important source of income was public funds. Endowments (listed on the survey as “own funds”) and national foundations were both cited by five organizations as their most important source. Indicative of the large amount of money given by national foundations, eight organizations (25%) cited national foundations as their second most important source of income.

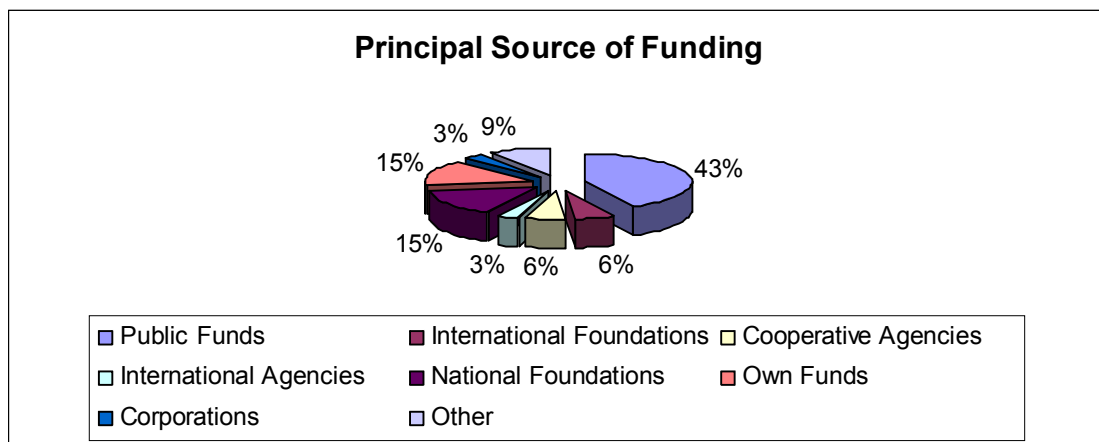


Figure 3: Proportions account for the data from 33 responding institutions

The think tanks selected for this study seem to actively maintain relations with several sectors of society. In this section, eight organizations declined to respond. Eighteen of the 29 responding institutions, or 62%, cite that they maintain relations with

all of the listed sectors.<sup>11</sup> All but one of the think tanks that responded claims to maintain working relations with other international institutes, 27 of the 29 (93%) maintain relations with foreign NGOs and 25 are active with national NGOs. Relations with the government are also common, with 24 of the 29 maintaining working relations specifically with the United States Government, and 22 organizations engaging foreign governments.

## **Legal Context**

Tax exempt classifications as determined by the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) are a distinguishing feature of think tanks and all other nonprofit organizations in the U.S. Most think tanks and research institutes have 501(c)(3) nonprofit statuses that, as mandated by United States Code (USC), are considered to be charitable organizations that operate exclusively for exempt purposes.<sup>12</sup> The think tanks with this status are deemed by the United States government to be engaged in research

---

<sup>11</sup> Surveyed organizations were asked if they maintained relations with any or all of the following: Domestic Governmental Organisms, Foreign Governmental Organisms, National NGOs, Foreign NGOs, and International Institutions.

<sup>12</sup> The term *charitable* is used in its generally accepted legal sense and includes relief of the poor, the distressed, or the underprivileged; advancement of religion; advancement of education or science; erecting or maintaining public buildings, monuments, or works; lessening the burdens of government; lessening neighborhood tensions; eliminating prejudice and discrimination; defending human and civil rights secured by law; and combating community deterioration and juvenile delinquency.

<http://www.irs.gov/charities/index.html>

that benefits the public good, and thus can qualify to be tax exempt. These organizations are restricted in their public advocacy activities, and the IRS explicitly prohibits the directors of the organizations from making public statements that demonstrate political opinion or orientation. Lastly, and most importantly, 501(c)(3) must not operate for the benefit of private interests.

As McGann points out, the think tank community is seeing a rise in the creation of 527 status think tanks. These types of organizations explicitly differ from 501(c)(3) organizations in that they operate as a politically driven organization, permitted to influence election outcomes and policy decisions toward a certain outcome.<sup>13</sup>

Organizations with 527 and 501(c)(3) statuses must both follow specific compliance procedure that includes filing public disclosure reports, and annual reports of income receipts and expenditures. Research institutes must also file paperwork that details the organization's research activities, publications and patents. According to the Department of the Treasury, noncompliance of 527 organizations in particular is a substantial challenge. Organizations with 527 statuses have been proven to violate IRS regulations by receiving contributions or paying out funds before they have been officially registered as a 527 nonprofit. The United States government estimates that they are owed up to \$7.5 million in noncompliance penalties.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> A political organization subject to 527 is a party, committee, association, fund, or other organization (whether or not incorporated) organized and operated primarily for the purpose of directly or indirectly accepting contributions or making expenditures, or both, for an exempt function.  
<http://www.irs.gov/charities/index.html>

<sup>14</sup> A recent report by the treasury department revealed "that an estimated 580 Section 527 political organizations may have started receiving contributions or making expenditures before notifying the IRS of their existence. We estimate these organizations may have received \$26.8 million that should have been reported as taxable income, and as a result, may be subject to approximately \$9.4 million in tax. In addition, Section 527 political organizations did not timely or completely report their contributions and expenditures by filing Forms 8872. We estimate that Section 527 political organizations filed 248 untimely

Some think tanks that perform a “business league” function exist under a particular 501(c)(6) classification of the Internal Revenue Code. A business league that would merit this status would be: “an association of persons having a common business interest, whose purpose is to promote the common business interest and not to engage in a regular business of a kind ordinarily carried on for profit. Its activities are directed to the improvement of business conditions of one or more lines of business rather than the performance of particular services for individual persons.”<sup>15</sup> These types of organizations must also have a membership base that benefits specifically from participation in the organization. Those that qualify for this status, such as the AS/COA, generally serve as a forum to facilitate communication and interaction between the business, academic and government sectors.

## **Conclusion**

The method of this paper of selecting think tanks based on their attention to a particular policy arena has many benefits. By targeting active players in the field of democratic consolidation in Latin America, the road is now paved for others to delve deeper into the particularities and specific dynamics of this “sub-government” (Abelson 2006). However, Abelson appropriately points out that studies of this nature have no means of assessing how much influence these actors actually have on U.S. public policy or the policy actions taken by Latin American decision makers. Hopefully this paper has

---

or incomplete Forms 8872. As a result, these organizations may be subject to over \$7.5 million in penalties.”

<http://www.treasury.gov/tigta/auditreports/2005reports/200510125fr.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopick03.pdf>

sufficiently mapped the field of these types of institution, and can serve as a departure for further investigation.

My results do show, however a series of conclusions descriptive of the state of institutions working on democratization issues in Latin America. From the data can see a correlation between the creation of Latin American centers of research and the prevalence of the region among United States interests. The increase in the number of centers through the 60s, 70s and 80s reflects the relevancy of Latin American issues to policymakers, as does the general decline in the creation of centers in recent years. The current staff size and budgets of Latin American centers seem to go hand in hand with this decline, but only with a similar study focusing on other regions of the world, for example the Middle East, can we get a clear idea of the relative state of Latin American research centers. Financial struggles and budgetary constraints present significant struggles for these organizations. With more support for overhead costs and core funding rather than short term, project specific disbursements, several would be able to increase awareness of their ideas, and also their influence in the policy world. The above points may describe the current state of the players in the field of democratization in Latin America, but given the nature of international affairs today, Latin America could re-emerge as the top concern of U.S. policymakers at any moment.

## **Glossary**

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full Name</b>
AS/COA	Americas Society/Council of the Americas
Brookings Institution	Brookings Institution
Carter Center- Emory University	Carter Center - Americas Program at Emory University
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CHP - UM	University of Miami - Center of Hemispheric Policy
CILAS - UCSD	Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies - University of California, San Diego
CIP	Center for International Policy
CIPE	Center for International Private Enterprise
CLAS - Georgetown University	Center for Latin American Studies - Georgetown University
CLAS - UCB	Center for Latin American Studies - University of California, Berkeley
CLAS - University of Chicago	Center for Latin American Studies - University of Chicago
CLAS - University of Pittsburgh	Center for Latin American Studies - University of Pittsburgh
COHA	Council on Hemispheric Affairs
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
DPLF	Due Process of Law Foundation
DRCLAS - Harvard University	David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies - Harvard University
HRW - Americas	Human Rights Watch - Americas Program
IAD	Inter-American Dialogue - Democratic governance program
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IAF	Inter-American Foundation
ILAS - Columbia University	Institute of Latin American Studies - Columbia University
ILAS - UNC	Institute of Latin American Studies - University of North Carolina
IRC	International Relations Center - Americas Program
IRI	International Republican Institute
Kellogg Institute - University of Notre Dame	Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies - University of Notre Dame
LAC - UCLA	Latin America Center - University of California, Los Angeles
LACC - FIU	Latin American and Caribbean Center - Florida International University
LAII - UNM	Latin America and Iberian Institute - University of New Mexico
LAPOP - Vanderbilt University	Latin America Public Opinion Project - Vanderbilt University
LLILAS - University of Texas, Austin	Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies - University of Texas, Austin
NACLA	North American Congress on Latin America
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NED - IFDS	National Endowment for Democracy – International Forum for Democratic Studies
OAS - UPD	Organization of American States - Unit for the Promotion of Democracy
Resource Center of the Americas.Org	Resource Center of the Americas.org
The Freedom House	The Freedom House
The Hoover Institution	The Hoover Institution - Stanford University
The MacMillan Center	The MacMillan Center - Yale University
The Solidarity Center	American Center of International Labor Solidarity
The Watson Institute	The Watson Institute - Brown University

UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
VICS	Virtual Institute of Caribbean Studies
WBI - Governance and Anti-Corruption	World Bank Institute - Governance and Anti-Corruption Unit
WOLA	Washington Office on Latin America
Woodrow Wilson International Center	Woodrow Wilson Center
WPI – The New School	World Policy Institute – The New School

\*\*Yellow indicates those institutes that did not respond to the survey

## Works Cited

- Abelson, Donald E. *American Think Tanks and their Role in US Foreign Policy*. New York, St. Martin's Press, Inc. 1996.  
--*A Capitol Idea*. Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006.
- Carothers, Thomas J. *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*. Washington D.C., The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999.
- Holcombe, Randall G. *Writing off Ideas: Taxation, Foundations and Philanthropy in America*. New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2000.
- McGann, James. "Scholars, Dollars and Policy Advice." Philadelphia, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2004.
- McGann, James, Johnson, Erik C.: *Comparative Think Tanks, Politics and Public Policy*. Cheltenham, Edward Edgar Publishing Limited 2005.  
-- "Development of Think Tanks and Their Role as Catalysts for Ideas and Actions in the U.S. Political System," speech delivered at U.S. Department of State's Foreign Press Briefing Center, February 28, 2006.  
<http://fpc.state.gov/fpc/62388.htm>
- Reagan, Ronald. Address. Appearance before British Parliament. Royal Gallery, Westminster Palace. June 8, 1982.  
<http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/reagan-parliament.htm>
- Rich, Andrew. *Think Tanks, Public Policy and the Politics of Expertise*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Smith, James Allen. *Idea Brokers*. New York, The Free Press, 1991.
- Stone, Diane. *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process*. London, Bookcraft (Bath) Ltd, 1996.
- Wallace, William. "Between Two Worlds: Think-tanks and foreign policy." *Two Worlds of International Relations*. Eds. Christopher Hill and Pamela Beshoff. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Wiarda, Howard J. *Democracy and Its Discontents*. Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995.  
--*Finding Our Way? Toward Maturity in U.S.-Latin American Relations*. Washington, D.C., American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1987.

### Websites Consulted:

- <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopick03.pdf>  
<http://www.irs.gov/charities/index.html>  
<http://www.treasury.gov/tigta/auditreports/2005reports/200510125fr.html>