Think Tanks in Australia:

Policy Contributions and Influence

by

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Statement of Originality

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work. It does not contain material published elsewhere except where expressly acknowledged. All research, field-work, and analysis have been completed by myself alone. The thesis has not been sent for external review, editing, or formatting. I take responsibility for all errors and omissions.

Trent A. Hagland
November, 2021

Abstract

The Australian think tank industry has grown substantially over the past two decades. Previously considered 'small and relatively unimportant' (I. Marsh and Stone, 2004, p. 262), these institutes are now at the forefront of political debates. Some have cultivated significant public profiles, and scholars have pointed to their important role in setting the public policy agenda. It has also become commonplace for think tanks to claim they have influenced (or seek to influence) the deliberations and proposals of Australia's major political parties. But can these influence claims be substantiated?

This thesis is the most comprehensive study of the Australian think tank industry to date and systematically examines think tanks' contributions and influence across the ideological spectrum. The research first investigates the structure of the Australian think tank industry, the characteristics of the participants, the targets of think tanks' influence efforts, the methods used to persuade policymakers (and public opinion), and policymaker and journalist perceptions of think tanks' effectiveness. The thesis then proceeds to examine three unique policy cases to empirically assess think tank influence on policymaking.

The study finds that think tanks can and do play important roles in Australia's policy process, but their impacts vary depending on their approach and objectives. Many think tanks target, and some succeed, in setting policy agendas. Others legitimate policymakers' proposals in the public sphere. And some prominent institutes more directly influence policy development and formulation. This thesis also finds that policymakers diverge in their assessments of think tanks' utility, and in their perceptions of think tanks' influence. Left-leaning parliamentarians see think tanks as important contributors to policymaking while those on the right are less-inclined to value think tank outputs.

This thesis shows that the Australian think tank industry defies generalisations, but its constituents are increasingly important components of Australia's political landscape.

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Part One

Chapter One: Think Tanks in Australia

1.1 Introduction

In 1984, the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke proclaimed that the Australian Fabians (a left-leaning policy institute) had 'made a specific and significant contribution to the Australian Labor Party' and that he 'gladly acknowledge[d] the debt of [his] own Government to Fabianism' (Hawke, 1984). In 2004, Prime Minister John Howard celebrated the 'new ideas and vigour' the Australian Strategic Policy Institute had injected into Australia's national security debates (Howard, 2004). And in 2013, then Opposition Leader Tony Abbott declared that John Roskam, the Executive Director of the Institute of Public Affairs (a right-leaning policy institute), had played a consequential role in the defeat of several government policy initiatives, stating 'John, whatever you did to persuade independent members of parliament, please, give it to me!' (Abbott, 2013).[1]

Who are these organisations injecting themselves into Australia's public policy debates? Do they genuinely exert an influence on Australian policymaking? And how have these unelected actors seemingly forged an important role for themselves in the policy process?

Often referred to as public policy institutes but more generally known as think tanks, these entities have proliferated in recent decades.[2,3] And with their increased numbers has come increased prominence. Some Australian think tanks have cultivated significant public profiles through regular media appearances and zealous policy advocacy. But many more are virtually unknown in the public sphere, despite being respected interlocutors within policy circles.

Think tanks' global proliferation might indicate a burgeoning demand for their products and services (J. Smith, 1991; I. Marsh, 1994, p. 178; Abelson, 2009, p. 178; McGann, 2018, pp. 11, 12). In Australia, for example, the domestically-focussed Grattan Institute asserts that its creation was demand-driven, stating 'it was formed in 2008 in response to a widespread view

[1] This thesis uses the broad terms 'left-leaning' and 'right-leaning' to capture those think tanks with discernible left and right philosophical orientations.
[2] This thesis uses the terms 'think tanks' and 'public policy institutes' interchangeably.
[3] Global think tank numbers have grown from 5,465 in 2007 to 11,175 in 2020, according to the widely quoted *Global Go To Think Tank Index* produced by the *Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program* (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania (McGann, 2009, 2021).

in government and business that Australia needed a non-partisan think-tank providing independent, rigorous and practical solutions to some of the country's most pressing problems' (Grattan, 2021). The increase in think tank numbers might alternatively suggest that new entrants covet incumbent institutes' real or perceived influence (a supply-driven phenomenon). Regardless, both demand and supply-driven explanations might elicit the presumption that think tanks exert public policy influence. But the policy process is immensely complex. Think tanks operate in a dynamic environment where rival groups and competing forces incessantly command policymakers' attention. Thus, there should be no presumption of think tank policy influence based on simple demand and supply arguments.

Scholars have consistently identified think tanks as discernible *contributors* to policymaking, especially at the early stages of the policy process (see, for example, Dickson, 1972; Critchlow, 1985; Ricci, 1993; Stone, 2000; Rich, 2004; t Hart and Vromen, 2008; Stahl, 2016). But relatively few in the academic community countenance think tanks' direct influence on policy formulation (that is, their tangible impacts on policy settings via the production of actionable policy proposals). This disinclination is well-founded given the many factors that affect the policy process. The caution also reflects the shortage of comprehensive empirical inquiry into think tank activities and impacts.

Establishing cause-and-effect relationships between think tank proposals and policy evolution is a formidable exercise, despite think tanks regularly pointing to their causal roles. Certainly, it is common for think tanks to claim that they influence the deliberations and policy prescriptions of Australia's major political parties.[4] Attempting to establish the veracity of these claims is, therefore, an appealing assignment for policy scholars.

Think tanks' claims of policy influence – and their mushrooming numbers – invite many lines of inquiry. This thesis nevertheless concentrates on one specific question:

What influence do think tanks exert on policymaking in Australia?

[4] For example, the Centre for Independent Studies states that it produces 'valuable research that has shaped and influenced public policy'; The Australia Institute insists it is 'one of the country's most influential think tanks'; the Committee for Economic Development of Australia asserts that 'we influence policy and collaborate to disrupt for good'; the Lowy Institute declares it 'helps set the national agenda'; the Australian Fabians 'influence political and public thinking'; while the Institute of Public Affairs suggests it is at the forefront of 'defining the contemporary political landscape'. See CEDA (2021a); CIS (2021); Fabians (2021); IPA (2021); Lowy (2021c); TAI (2021a).

This study seeks to establish whether think tanks do more than just 'contribute' to the policy process. It seeks to establish whether think tanks can and do play a central role in influencing policymaking. After all, this is what many think tanks claim. It is also how the media commonly depict think tanks in the public sphere. So, despite the empirical challenges, it is important to examine and explain the role and influence of these unique groups.

Similar questions have been empirically interrogated in the United States (for example, Rich, 2004; Abelson, 2009), in Canada (for example, Lindquist, 1989; Abelson, 2016), and the United Kingdom (for example, Denham, 1996). But beyond notable contributions from Ian Marsh (1980) and Diane Stone (1993) – both of whom document Australia's nascent think tank industry – there has been no broad-based, comprehensive examination of Australia's policy institute landscape and the accompanying influence of its constituents. Most Australian studies instead focus on the crusades of 'neoliberal' institutes and largely ignore the development and influence of Australia's broader think tank industry (see, for example, Cahill, 2004; Thackrah, 2012; Kelly, 2017). As such, this study contributes to the existing body of literature by providing the most extensive examination of Australia's contemporary think tank landscape to date.

1.2 Think Tanks and Public Policy Influence

It is important to establish how this thesis defines think tanks. Scholars have conceptualised these boundary-spanning groups in various ways, but a consensus is increasingly emerging around James McGann's definition, partially due to its use in the prominent *Global Go-To Think Tank Index*. McGann submits that think tanks are:

> Public policy research, analysis, and engagement institutions that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues that enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues. Think tanks may be affiliated with a political party, a university, or a government; they are independent institutions that are structured as permanent bodies, not ad hoc commissions (McGann, 2016, p. 10).

The present study adopts McGann's conceptualisation because it suitably captures the range of institutes performing policy-relevant research and analysis in Australia. Chapter Two further examines the contested nature of think tank definitions and the structural features that divide scholarly interpretations on the think tank designation.

Think tanks primarily seek to influence public policy by producing ideas and dispensing expertise. Their purposeful engagement on policy issues has encouraged some scholars to position them as members (or a branch) of a broad sub-government that exerts influence on formal policy institutions (see, for example, Hilsman, 1967, p. 10; Truman, 1967, p. 505; Dickson, 1972, p. 45; Critchlow, 1985, p. 175). Such characterisations highlight the importance of understanding think tanks' activities and objectives. The voting public might expect that government insiders create policy and act in the interests of the populace. But if third-party actors without a distinguishable constituency (a defining think tank characteristic) are intentionally influencing policy decisions, their involvement in the democratic process is worthwhile identifying and explaining.

The concept of influence is necessarily central to think tank studies because the vast majority declare policy influence to be their raison d'être. Indeed, this study establishes that 98 per cent of Australian think tanks identify policy influence as their primary objective. But their success in achieving that objective remains an open question. This thesis is equally open to the idea that think tanks might influence the broader policy environment or that they might more directly influence policy outcomes.[5] The extant literature more often characterises think tanks as agenda-setters; as persuading the early stages of the policy process (see, for example, Stone, 2004). But some institutes imagine themselves playing a less ambiguous role. For instance, The Australia Institute asserts:

> When we talk about 'research that matters' we are talking about making real, tangible changes that would not have happened if we were not there to make them happen (TAI, 2021b).

Few think tanks are as flamboyant in their claims, but the broader point is that many think tanks see themselves as important contributors to policy formulation rather than principally defining issues and establishing narratives. Specific policy influence claims are also more amenable to investigation. And, as Abelson and Brooks (2018, p. 8) assert, the 'impulse' to investigate claims of overt influence are 'irresistible'.

[5] Chapter Three specifically defines these terms.

1.3 What We Know, and What We Do Not

There is a relatively modest body of literature interrogating the role and influence of think tanks. Much of the foundational research emanated from the late 1980s and the early 1990s and predominantly focussed on the development of the US industry (see, for example, Critchlow, 1985; Peschek, 1987; Lindquist, 1989; Weaver, 1989; McGann, 1991; J. Smith, 1991; Ricci, 1993; Stone, 1993; Abelson, 1996). Paul Dickson (1972) completed the first full-length, think tank-dedicated study in the US and asserted that incumbent institutes 'had a great influence on federal decision-making' and that they would 'continue to gain power over policy, action and all our lives' (pp. 158, 347). Donald Critchlow (1985) similarly suggested that think tanks had 'created a powerful influence on governmental policy making' and that they 'exert a disproportionate influence on the policy process' (p. 175). David Ricci (1993) went further and claimed that think tanks 'exercise considerable influence over every realm of American life' (p. 17). But there is also notable dissent to these early affirmations.

Evert Lindquist (1989) challenged the proclamations contained in earlier studies and stated that 'the basis for [scholars] claims appears to be weak' (p. 104). His empirical examination of the Canadian industry found that 'very few institute contributions were perceived [by policymakers] to be truly enlightening, [which] comes as a shock' (p. 229). Similarly, James A. Smith (1991) dismissed some institutes' 'grandiose' influence claims and asserted that 'direct influence on policy should not be overstated' (pp. 188-189, 229). Smith echoed Joseph Peschek (1987), who sees think tanks as part of an elite network that shapes America's policy agenda rather than capable of directly impacting policy development.

More recently, Andrew Rich's (2004) widely-cited empirical examination of the US industry provided credible evidence of think tank influence at distinct points in the policy cycle. Donald Abelson (2006) also evidenced think tanks' 'discernible impact', but later admonished think tank scholars, stating that 'claims regarding the widespread influence of think tanks are often exaggerated and unfounded' (Abelson, 2006, p. 8; Abelson et al., 2018, p. 83). Abelson's caution is consistent with Diane Stone's earlier wariness. In the edited volume *Think Tank Traditions*, Stone noted that the book's contributors 'are sceptical of direct think tank impact on politics' (Stone, 2004, p. 11). Nevertheless, the international literature mostly concedes that think tanks do play a role in the policy process, despite differing interpretations regarding the manifestation and extent of their influence. On the other hand,

the relatively insubstantial body of recent Australian literature largely presupposes think tank influence. The present study is one of the few that empirically and critically examines think tank claims in the Australian setting.

Ian Marsh (1980) pioneered think tank research in Australia and identified a population of only nine institutes in his original ground-breaking study. Marsh's assessment of the Australian landscape led him to conclude that 'independent public policy research on the American model is currently virtually non-existent in Australia' (pp. 86-87, 101). Although later asserting that Australian think tanks wielded little political influence and were 'small and relatively unimportant organisations', I. Marsh and Stone (2004, pp. 257, 262) suggested that think tanks do play a role in 'shaping the climate of public opinion.' Paul 't Hart and Ariadne Vromen (2008) noted Australia's escalating think tank numbers and urged scholars to pursue systematic investigations of the industry to more clearly establish think tanks' roles in the policy process and their influence on policymaking. But despite their appeals, there have been few comprehensive examinations of the Australian think tank industry subsequent to their study.

The contemporary Australian think tank industry is worthy of greater examination. Except for several mainly polemical pieces since the turn of the century, the industry has been largely neglected as part of Australia's broader interest group and policy network landscape. The present study seeks to bridge that gap. Think tanks' growing prominence and their overt claims of success deserve greater attention to determine whether their declarations accord with reality and whether these unelected actors play consequential roles in determining Australia's policy settings.

1.4 Study Structure

This study examines the broad Australian think tank industry. It does not exclusively isolate any think tank sub-sector (such as right-leaning institutes) or any particular policy issue. It seeks to explain the role and influence of think tanks in Australia and provide insights into how they attempt to influence policy, when they seek to exert influence, who they target, and the broader perceptions of their usefulness and effectiveness. Normative questions asking (amongst other things) whether think tanks *should* be involved in the policy process, or if they have a desirable impact on policy, are not tackled in this thesis. That line of inquiry is left for future research.

The study proceeds across three parts.[6] Part One incorporates Chapters One to Three and covers the essential background and design elements of the study. The study's empirical elements commence in Part Two, which incorporates Chapters Four to Eight. These chapters extensively examine think tank's activities and objectives and provide the understandings necessary to interpret and analyse think tank influence claims. Part Three incorporates Chapters Nine to Twelve and directly tackles the study's central research question. These chapters specifically interrogate think tank influence claims across three separate policy issues.

This study's empirical components (as presented in Parts Two and Three) incorporate three distinct research strands. Strand one collects data through document analysis and expert surveys and primarily informs the analysis in Part Two. Strand two uses semi-structured interviews to further develop the themes emanating from the strand one data analysis. The data collected from semi-structured interviews inform the analysis in Parts Two and Three. The final research strand comprises three individual case studies (constituting Part Three) executed using the process tracing method. Strand three's approach is consistent with Baumgartner et al. (2009) and Halpin and Fraussen (2017, pp. 723-724) in that it assesses think tank policy influence at the individual issue level. The case selection process in strand three focuses on (potentially) positive cases. Because this study seeks to identify the manifestation of think tank influence and the circumstances under which it might occur, selecting (potentially) positive cases provides the best opportunity to accomplish that objective (Chapter Three more extensively expands on the study's design).

Across the three research strands (diagrammatically presented on page 44) the study incorporates data from one-hundred-and-eighty-six expert survey responses, one-hundred-and-eight semi-structured interviews, attendance at forty-three live think tank events, the consumption of two-hundred-and-fourteen podcasts, the viewing of fifty think tank YouTube videos, and the scrutiny of a legion of research reports and social media activity. The data indicate that public policy institutes are well versed in the art of persuasion. The study shows that many think tanks not only have the capacity to influence policymaking, but the ones examined in Part Three have successfully exerted influence (in varying degrees and manifestations). The research also demonstrates how this influence is achieved.

[6] This study was approved by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee under Project Number 2019/249. The ethics approval letter is presented in Appendix U.

This study proceeds through twelve main chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two explores the existing international and Australian think tank literature. The review initially focuses on the foundational international literature from the late twentieth century – a period when the Australian think tank industry and its scholarly examination were together insubstantial. The focus then turns to the Australian think tank literature, which, to the present day, remains relatively modest. The review also explores the key themes, concepts and theories that purport to explain think tank roles, activities, influence, and space in the broader social structure.

Chapter Three more comprehensively details this study's research design. It specifies the supplementary research questions that support the central question, and also presents the influence conceptualisation that anchors the study. The chapter sets out the Shiffman and Smith (2007) analytical framework that steers the examination of think tank influence in Part Three. The chapter also details the mixed-methodology and methods used to collect data throughout the study.

Part Two of this study commences in Chapter Four. This chapter examines the structure of the Australian think tank industry and identifies the characteristics and resources of its constituents. The data demonstrate the tremendous diversity within the industry across size, structural affiliations, ideological orientations, and policy capacities. The analysis extends to the financial circumstances of several prominent institutes and illustrates the importance of fiscal resources to the generation and proselytisation of policy ideas.

Chapter Five then explains how the industry arrived at its current state. It shows that the Australian industry has evolved across four distinctive eras, and it details the factors contributing to these new growth waves. The chapter evidences the rapid growth in think tank numbers over the past two decades and shows that prior impediments to the industry's development no longer persist. The evidence also suggests that the Australian industry is not as small or as insignificant as some suggest. It has matured to the extent that its size is comparable (on a relative basis) to those industries in countries with longer histories.

This thesis shows that the overwhelming majority of Australian think tanks primarily seek to influence public policy. Chapter Six examines the targets of these influence efforts and also investigates the policy cycle stage at which think tanks attempt to exert influence. The chapter shows that policy institutes primarily target a policymaker audience, although many extend their focus to other audiences depending on their resource endowment and the nature

of their messages. The selection of target audience corresponds to decisions on policy cycle priorities. Most think tanks concentrate on early cycle (agenda setting) activities, although some elite audiences believe think tanks contribute more when focusing on late-cycle (policy formulation) activities.

Chapter Seven more closely examines the methods policy institutes use to exert influence. Think tanks express ideas in many ways, but the packaging and conveyance of these ideas are critical choices that substantially impact think tank success. The chapter shows that institute characteristics and objectives play important roles in method decisions, while material resources regulate the available method choices. The chapter reveals divergences based on think tanks' ideological persuasions and the orientations of their target audiences. Policymaker receptiveness to think tank ideation is not as homogenous as has been assumed.

Think tanks create narratives around their policy contributions to perpetuate perceptions that they are relevant actors in the policy process. Chapter Eight explains the importance of elite audience perceptions. Think tank claims and audience perceptions augment organisational legitimacy and, crucially, support fundraising efforts. Elite audiences mostly agree that think tanks play influential roles in the policy process, but there is variation in the interpretation of its manifestation. The chapter provides further evidence regarding policymakers' divergent preferences and perceptions based on their ideological orientations.

Chapters Four through Eight primarily confront this thesis' supplementary research questions. The central research question cannot be properly prosecuted in the absence of this analysis, as it is critical to understand policy institutes structure, objectives, and activities before assessing their success (or ability to succeed). Part Three commences in Chapter Nine and, along with Chapters Ten and Eleven, directly challenge this study's central research question: what influence do think tanks exert on policymaking? All three chapters use the Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework to explain the extent of individual think tanks' influence on separate policy issues (presented as three independent case studies).

Chapter Nine first examines the influence of the right-leaning Centre for Independent Studies on New South Wales child protection and adoption reforms. It finds that the institute played a discernible role in escalating the issue to the status of political priority. Chapter Ten then investigates the Grattan Institute's influence on the federal government's school funding reforms and asserts that the institute was a central actor in the debate and – at a minimum – legitimated the government's proposals in the public sphere. Finally, Chapter Eleven

interrogates the Lowy Institute's influence on the understanding and treatment of Australia's so-called 'diplomatic deficit' (the purported resource deficiency suffered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade). The chapter finds that Lowy dominated the issue debate and successfully made the issue a political priority, but was unable to convert it into a policy priority.

The concluding Chapter Twelve discusses the study's key findings and expands on four key themes emanating from the preceding chapters. The chapter first discusses think tanks' divergent approaches and impacts across ideological orientations. The chapter then discusses the divergences and determinants of think tank policy capacities, demonstrating that material resources, while crucial, do not in and of themselves determine policy capacity. Attention then turns to the discussion of theory. This thesis does not set out to build or test theories, but it does make observations regarding several prominent theories and their application in the Australian context. Network theories receive particular attention here due to their present ascendancy in the literature. Finally, Chapter Twelve discusses the various manifestations of think tank influence uncovered in the three case studies. In sum, the final chapter highlights the tremendous diversity in the Australian think tank industry and how it defies uniform characterisation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

With a few key exceptions, it is striking how little has been written since Ian Marsh published his ground-breaking comparative study entitled *An Australian Think Tank?* in 1980. The growth in Australian think tank numbers has not been accompanied by a proliferation of academic works, leaving underexamined the influence of this organisational species. As such, this literature review adopts a broad perspective and seeks to leverage the more expansive body of international research to establish context for this Australia-centred study.

Much of the existing think tank literature focuses on the history of individual institutes, industry demographics, theoretical frameworks, and the development of the ideas industry more generally (see, for example, Weaver, 1989; McGann, 1991; J. Smith, 1991; Ricci, 1993; Stone and Denham, 2004; Weidenbaum, 2009; Medvetz, 2014; Drezner, 2017). But several scholars note and lament the lack of penetrating empirical work on think tank influence. Abelson (2009, p. 3) asserts that 'few studies to date have assessed the influence or impact of think tanks on policy-making.' In a more direct challenge, he posits that 'it is disconcerting that most scholars who study [think tank] behaviour have not been more critical in challenging their claims of influence.' Instead, they have 'been content to make sweeping assertions' based on 'unfounded observations' (Abelson, 2006, p. xi). This literature review focuses on existing studies that are most relevant to the treatment of this supposed influence.

The chapter consists of four sections. After this introduction, the second section chronologically examines the foundational international literature that contemplates think tank influence. The section reviews the pivotal concepts, methods, theories, and controversies identified in this body of literature to help sharpen the focus of the present study. It is no coincidence that much of this research emanates from the United States given assertions that think tanks originated in the US and represent a uniquely American phenomenon (McGann, 1991, p. 104). Although some scholars dispute such claims, it is beyond doubt that US scholars have dominated the field owing to the extensive development of the US industry (Stone, 1993, pp. 59-61; Denham and Garnett, 1998, p. 21; McGann, 2020).

The third section focuses on the Australian think tank literature. As noted, there are relatively few studies dedicated to examining Australian think tanks' influence, and most tend

to focus on the rise of conservative institutes and their accompanying ideological agenda (see, for example, Thackrah, 2012; Kelly, 2017; Murray, 2017). This section situates the present thesis in the Australian literature, and identifies the gap filled by the study. The formative years of the Australian industry are adequately covered in prior works and are not discussed in great detail here (see, for example, I. Marsh, 1980; Stone, 1993; Cahill, 2004; I. Marsh and Stone, 2004).

The final section explores some of the core concepts associated with think tanks by specifically examining three issues. First, the section reviews definitional debates and the accompanying concept of think tank independence. Next, the section discusses the typologies that enable the examination of think tanks in greater individual detail. Finally, the section considers the theories that seek to explain how and why think tanks might exert influence, and the space think tanks inhabit in the broader social structure. All three topics remain central to the discussion of think tanks and are important inputs to the ensuing analysis of the industry landscape.

2.2 Foundational Literature

This section proceeds chronologically to illustrate the development of the industry and the understanding of the field over time. As this longitudinal discussion demonstrates, the evolution of think tank scholarship correlates to the development of policy-process theories, in addition to the methods and practices of think tanks themselves.

Paul Dickson's (1972) examination of US think tanks focuses on their role as knowledge providers in the national security sphere. While Dickson purports to profile the broad industry, the RAND Corporation is clearly his story's central character. For Dickson, the think tank world seems to have barely existed before the formalisation of RAND in 1948. He further suggests that many institutes established in the ensuing decades owe their existence to RAND in one way or another (p. 86).

Dickson situates think tanks as an outgrowth of the military-industrial complex and focuses on those affiliated with, or part of, the government. Indeed, he views think tanks as 'the most powerful' actor in the government-sponsored research and development field (p. 20). His analysis here betrays his normative disposition. For example, in his profiling of the Institute for Defense Analyses, Dickson (p. 146) contends that 'the institute constitutes graphic evidence of how faceless men with a general disdain for Congress and without publicly

scrutinized opinions have moved into the policy-making apparatus of government.' He intensifies his argument by stating that think tanks 'have been given some of the powers of government itself' and that they have 'served to extend the power of the Pentagon over Congress' (p. 158). For Dickson, think tanks have an undoubted, if undesirable, influence on government policy in the strategic field, and this influence is said to be spreading to other non-security related areas (although this claim is not empirically evidenced).

Dickson's work suggests that direct access to government officials – the think tank method at the heart of his analysis – is an effective channel to exert influence.[7] This broader theme is readily portable to the Australian environment. Political access matters and those policy institutes armed with expert knowledge (like the RAND Corporation, in Dickson's case) have the potential to shape the political landscape according to their preferences.

Similar to Dickson, Donald Critchlow focuses his 1985 study on a single entity: in this case, the Brookings Institution. Critchlow sets out his story as the birth of an industry, and Brookings is at the heart of its evolution (contrary to Dickson's thesis).[8] Critchlow details the powerful forces behind the demand for independent policy advice and demonstrates why Brookings became influential during the Progressive Era and the subsequent Great Depression. Critchlow's extensive examination of Brookings' employee philosophies and their elite connections advances a theme that Dickson distinguishes: connections and political access are significant variables impacting think tanks' ability to influence. Here, Critchlow explicitly positions Brookings' key protagonists as part of an elite (p. 8). Their affluence and qualifications – in addition to their close relationships with politicians and other wealthy industrialists – fosters the belief that they are entitled to act on behalf of a poorly informed and unpredictable public.

While Critchlow's focus is on the Brookings Institution, his work more particularly examines the role of unelected, unaccountable actors in the policy process. Brookings is merely the referential actor in a broader social and political examination. Critchlow furthers the relevance of his account by demonstrating the role Brookings played in the eventual rise of partisan think tanks, despite Brookings being demonstrably non-partisan in its formative

[7] For more recent literature prosecuting interest group access, see, for example, Binderkrantz et al. (2015) and Halpin and Fraussen (2017).

[8] The Brookings Institution was officially founded in 1927, but its antecedent organisations, the Institute of Government Research, the Institute of Economics, and the Robert Brookings Graduate School, were established in 1916, 1922 and 1924, respectively. They combined to form Brookings in 1927 (Critchlow, 1985).

years. Critchlow suggests that Brookings' reorientation toward a progressive platform created fertile ground for the rise of partisan institutes that promote ideologically oriented social and political ideas.

Joseph Peschek (1987) also adopts an elite perspective in examining the influence of five leading 'policy-planning organisations' in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s.[9] Peschek ascribes considerable importance to this turbulent period which he believes resulted in an ideological (re)invigoration of security-conscious and corporate-oriented conservative policy ideas. Peschek focuses on the agenda-setting stage of the policy process and seeks to highlight the ideational, rather than the material, impact of think tank policy work. In an oft-quoted passage, Peschek (p. 7) posits:

> Political scientists who examine policy only as the outcome either of intergovernmental processes or of overt interest group pressure from outside the government will miss the significance of policy-planning groups in the political process, for it is at the more subtle levels of identifying and defining problems, shaping public understanding of issues, and constructing a political agenda that their impact is felt.

Peschek (pp. 4, 13) asserts that policy-planning organisations are 'representative of a larger elite policy network' and that there is 'a great deal of evidence' that they have had a discernible impact on state policy. He contends that policy institute activities (particularly on the conservative side) are designed to ensure that an elite fraternity maintains control over policy levers.

Peschek's thesis is important and provocative. He advances a theory of democratic subversion via an elite network of well-connected policy institutes. For Peschek, the success of conservative think tanks in shifting ideological boundaries to the right illustrates the substantial role that think tanks can play in the policy process. Several scholars convincingly emulate Peschek's foundational work on the policy impact of conservative think tanks (see, for example, Denham, 1996; Stahl, 2016). Right-leaning institutes also dominate the thoughts of Australian scholars, with Cahill (2004), Thackrah (2012) and Kelly (2017) all pointing to the agenda-setting impact of conservative institutes on the Australian political landscape.

But it was Evert Lindquist (1989) who undertook the first major systematic investigation of think tank policy influence. In his PhD (focusing on the Canadian industry), Lindquist directly

[9] The five think tanks Peschek examines are the Brookings Institution, Trilateral Commission, American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation, and Institute for Contemporary Studies.

confronts the question others had hitherto reckoned the answer: do think tanks influence policymaking? His benchmark study examines think tanks' processes and methods and empirically assesses their influence. Based on original interview evidence, Lindquist challenges claims that think tanks are directly relevant to policymaking (p. 8) and ultimately concludes that the institutes he examines are unworthy of their (self-perpetuated) lionisation. He rejects unsupported influence declarations and plainly asserts that 'the basis for these claims appears to be weak' (p. 104).

Lindquist sees policy institutes as expert 'outsiders' in broader policy networks – a departure from prior studies which position think tanks as part of a selective elite (pp. 28, 71, 147). Further, he questions whether some think tanks do indeed target policymaking due to their predominant focus on public persuasion. Lindquist discounts these efforts and suggests that think tanks' lack of focus on 'policy-relevant work' contributes to their broader lack of relevance (p. 268). In this way, Lindquist's work challenges in unequivocal terms the most fundamental of think tank contentions. His study illustrates the importance of empirically evaluating think tank claims before conceding their influence from either an ideational or material perspective.

Focusing his analysis on a different theme, James A. Smith (1991) charts the historical development of the US think tank industry and chronologically assesses the circumstances that shape the role of experts in public policymaking. According to Smith, the ideological orientations and distinctive events encountered by successive twentieth-century Presidents had a substantial impact on their administration's amenability to think tank advice. His narrative skilfully captures the perceptible waves in the industry's evolution and offers a cogent timeline of the institutionalisation of think tank expertise. The present thesis draws on Smith's analysis to assess the responsiveness of Australia's major political parties to think tank ideation and the discernible evolutionary themes applicable to the Australian landscape.

The evolution of ideas is central to Smith's analysis. He shows how contrasting philosophies (Keynesianism and the Austrian school) encouraged different styles of think tank engagement, while particularly emphasising the enduring impact of the 'Reagan revolution' on the ideas marketplace (pp. 167-170). But Smith is circumspect when it comes to think tank influence – and prudently so given he does not specifically assess policy cases. He dismisses conservative institutes' 'grandiose claims' and points to only 'crude connections' of think tank influence on policy outcomes (pp. 188-189). Smith ultimately asserts that '*direct* influence on

policy should not be overstated', instead emphasising the diffuse effects of knowledge creation – so crucial for think tank policy relevance (p. 229, italics added).

David Ricci (1993) follows Smith (1991) and examines the historical development of the American think tank industry. He traces the trends that disrupted America's political and social environment and relates those trends to the increased prominence of think tanks in the 1970s and 1980s. In prosecuting his case, Ricci's historical account is conspicuous by the absence of any substantive discussion on specific policy issues or individual entities. Nevertheless, his focus is quite clear: he seeks to identify the fundamental drivers of think tank proliferation and the reasons behind their apparent effectiveness.

Ricci (1993, pp. 2, 17) asserts that think tanks 'exercise considerable influence over every realm of American life.' He argues that this influence substantially relies upon effective marketing, where institutes promote (through the mass media) intelligibly repackaged academic research to inform politicians and persuade the general public (pp. 22, 163). This claim is controversial and challenges the notion that think tanks leverage their in-house expertise to originate ideas and propose novel solutions to policy problems. Ricci also urges academicians to 'pay more attention […] to the question of which ideas will be *received* successfully' in the prevailing political environment (p. 193, italics added). This important insight aids the selection of the analytical framework in the present study by insisting that the framework contemplates policy-issue characteristics and the prevailing political context.

Donald Abelson (1996) builds on Peschek (1987) and Ricci (1993) and similarly distinguishes the 1970s and 1980s as a particularly consequential period for the US think tank industry. He posits that many think tanks became 'lobbyists' in this era, contrasting the earlier 'prototypical' think tanks that conducted themselves as detached purveyors of non-partisan policy expertise (p. 5).

Abelson examines competing theoretical models to assess think tanks' role in foreign policy-making and concludes that most models are too narrow to explain how think tanks 'identify and shape policy issues and problems' (pp. 103-118). He also contemplates the various methods think tanks use to exert influence, particularly emphasising media marketing and political access. In this way, Abelson extends Critchlow's (1985) theme but overstates his argument by suggesting that 'without access to political leaders […] policy research institutions would likely vanish into obscurity' (Abelson, 1996, p. 120). This contentious point does not sufficiently recognise think tank efforts to influence public opinion or government

agencies (regardless of the structure of the US political system). In a system less amenable to political access, indirect influence allows think tanks to remain, at a minimum, relevant to the policymaking process.

Abelson follows up his earlier study with his penetrating volume, *Do Think Tanks Matter?* (Abelson, 2009). Here, he comparatively assesses the role and influence of US and Canadian think tanks at various points along the policy cycle. Despite identifying how and when policy institutes inject themselves into the policy process, Abelson concludes that it is unclear whether their engagement is influential. He submits that differences in policymaking environments and political systems are potentially important determinants of think tank effectiveness (pp. 75-76). In the United States, the federal system of government, the weak party system, and the separation of power between the executive and legislature provide fertile ground for think tank engagement. On the other hand, parliamentary systems are characterised by an authoritative central government and strong party identification, making it more difficult for think tanks to isolate avenues of influence. These structural observations provide important context when assessing think tank influence in Australia's composite 'Washminster' system (Thompson, 2007). The analysis in Part Two of this thesis considers whether structural or institutional constraints impede Australian think tanks' efforts to exert influence.

Andrew Rich (1999) advances the US think tank literature with his benchmark systematic examination of think tank influence. Rich's study is the most comprehensive empirical work since Lindquist's interrogation of the Canadian industry, and it meaningfully informs the design and methods employed in the present study. Rich fills a gap in the existing US literature by specifically examining think tank impact on individual policy issues. He empirically interrogates the effectiveness of think tanks by surveying and interviewing a broad group of congressional policymakers and political journalists. Rich posits that think tanks can indeed be influential, but the magnitude of that influence is both unquantifiable and policy-stage dependent.

Rich finds that politicians and journalists almost universally concede that think tanks are influential policy actors (1999, p. 48). He suggests that these perceptions are the product of intensive think tank marketing and that the marketing of ideas, once considered anathema to the think tank community, is not only pervasive but a preoccupation. Ultimately, Rich shows

that the effective marketing of proprietary research is a consequential determinant of think tank policy influence (Rich, 2004, pp. 206-207).

In his provocative work, sociologist Thomas Medvetz (2014) envisages think tanks playing a 'mediating role in the social structure', being the principal interlocutor between the media, political, economic, and academic fields of power (p. 25). Medvetz characterises much of the existing theory on the conceptualisation and understanding of think tanks as myopic. He seeks to re-conceptualise think tanks and proffers what he considers a more meaningful interpretation of the status and pertinence of these unique entities.

Medvetz asserts that the ubiquity of think tanks has relegated those knowledge producers working outside of the think tank social space to peripheral roles in the policy process (p. 225). That is, Medvetz controversially suggests that think tanks have had a detrimental impact on the relevance and accessibility of knowledge created by academic experts and public intellectuals. In this way, Medvetz's conceptualisation implicitly assumes that think tanks are influential actors in the policy process. Without presupposing influence, the idea of the marginalisation of those outside a privileged macrostructure loses potency. Medvetz presents a unique perspective on public policy institutes. His theoretical deliberations challenge the traditional ways scholars have imagined think tanks and are as important as they are contestable. These ideas are discussed further in Section Four of this chapter.

Themes

The are several prominent themes in this foundational international literature. First, there are debates around the theories that best describe think tanks' roles, social position, and behaviours. These theories are most commonly classified into elite, pluralist, and network perspectives. Second, there are claims that the stage of the policy cycle that think tanks concentrate their efforts critically impacts their effectiveness. Here, debates centre on think tanks' ability to directly persuade policymakers, and their efforts to reorient the policy environment through the public marketing of their ideas. Third, scholars have sought to illuminate *how* think tanks influence public policy. The methods think tanks use have naturally evolved, with the earlier primacy of political access matched in the present day by the aggressive marketing of policy-relevant content. Fourth, there have been relatively few attempts to systematically evidence the existence of think tank influence. There is broad

agreement that evidencing influence is a complex task, but less agreement regarding the extent of think tanks' claimed influence. Finally, there are ongoing differences regarding the conceptualisation of think tanks. Definitional debates typically revolve around the nature of think tank activities and the notion of independence. Section Four explores each of these themes in greater detail.

2.3 Australian Literature

In his early exploration of the nascent Australian think tank industry, Ian Marsh (1980) makes an important (but scarcely noted) contribution to the literature. His comparative study assesses the policymaking environment and political traditions that think tanks encounter in the US, Great Britain, and Canada. Marsh states that the policy research industry in Australia 'barely exists', and he accordingly attempts to draw lessons from his comparative analysis for the development of the local industry (p. 85).

Marsh asserts that the US policy-research marketplace is the benchmark against which all other countries should be measured. He argues that America's distinctive political institutions naturally invite think tank participation in the policymaking process. On the other hand, the Westminster system throws up innumerable obstacles to the consideration of external policy ideas. Marsh emphatically pursues this point and plainly states that think tanks in parliamentary systems 'lack clients for their work' (1980, p. x). He contends that Westminster systems need to remove structural impediments that prevent think tanks from making consequential contributions to policymaking.

Marsh draws lessons for Australia from his comparative analysis and proposes several measures that are both instructive and prophetic. In this way, he combines his empirical analysis with a normative disposition, emphasising a fundamental need for Australian policymakers to welcome externally generated ideas. More specifically,

- Marsh observes that the Australian government provides 'pitifully low levels of support' for think tanks and urges the federal government to directly fund policy institutes (pp. 4, 91);
- he encourages the introduction of tax breaks to promote third party sponsorship of think tanks (pp. 64, 92), and;

- he suggests the government should encourage senior civil servants to participate in 'exchange arrangements' with policy institutes to promote the transfer of policy expertise (pp. x, 94).

But Marsh is dubious about the prospects for the Australian think tank industry, even with the systematic adoption of these proposed measures. He states:

> The best outcome – [where] a number of research sources serve a variety of clients in the policy development process, at different phases in the emergence of a political problem, culminating in the adoption of wise policies – will be virtually impossible to achieve (I. Marsh, 1980, p. 86).

Despite his caution, Marsh's propositions have been substantially realised, and the industry has developed to the degree he previously considered improbable. Certainly, many Australian think tank executives would assert that Marsh's 'best outcome' accurately reflects the state of play in the industry today.

Marsh follows up his initial account with an Australia-specific contribution (I. Marsh, 1991). Here, Marsh uses an expansive definition that captures university-affiliated research centres and public sector research entities to examine think tanks' role, structures and outputs. These university- and government-affiliated entities dominate his identified population (of seventy-five think tanks), with only fourteen entities structurally independent (1991, p. 32). Marsh's endorsement of an expansive definition privileges the roles and activities of policy institutes rather than demarcating the field based on interpretations of independence. The present thesis follows Marsh by adopting an expansive think tank conceptualisation, as Chapter Three explains.

Marsh revisits his antecedent research in 1994 and observes some 'encouraging developments' regarding the evolution of the Australian industry. He notes a 'considerable government-led effort to mobilise the intellectual resources of the university sector' in favour of public policymaking (1994, p. 196). But importantly, Marsh notes that an assessment of university-based research centre influence remains outstanding. There have been few contributions in this regard since.[10]

[10] Vas (2012) being one notable exception.

Following Marsh, Diane Stone (1993) also performs a comparative analysis of the think tank environment in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. Stone uses an epistemic community framework (Haas, 1992) alongside the agenda-setting concept (Kingdon, 2011) to argue that think tanks 'introduce new ideas for public debate, identify problems and sway elite and public opinion rather than become involved in the details of policy implementation or the formal decision making process' (1993, p. iv). In this way, Stone diverges from Lindquist (1989), who previously rebuked policy institutes for their lack of direct policymaker engagement and their insufficient focus on policy implementation. Stone is instead adamant that think tanks are most effective when trafficking in ideas and attempting to influence the policy environment. Both, however, essentially arrive at the same conclusion: Stone argues that direct policy influence is unlikely; Lindquist attempts to evidence it and finds it lacking.

Stone (1993) explains think tanks' roles and impacts by focussing on their idea propagation and knowledge transfer. She sees think tanks providing public goods, linking various actors in epistemic communities (networks of specialists) to improve the understanding of policy issues and to inform public policy deliberations (p. 4). The present thesis accommodates Stone's network perspectives (alongside similar policy network concepts) in a versatile multi-theoretical framework that seeks to explain policy influence (as Chapter Three later details).

Stone dismisses claims of direct think tank influence on policy outcomes. She asserts that 'the influence or impact of think tanks on policy remains limited to developing policy alternatives and diffusing ideas', and also objects to a more 'narrow interpretation [which] posits that only direct impact […] warrants the description of influence' (1993, pp. 3, 130). Stone emphasises think tanks' role in moulding policy narratives. She declares that policy institutes do not 'establish a causal force for [policy] transfer' and that their 'prime importance is in the construction of legitimacy for certain policies and agenda-setting' (Stone, 2000, p. 66).

In a co-authored piece with Ian Marsh, Stone underscores her reservations surrounding think tank relevance and impact. I. Marsh and Stone (2004) together depict the Australian industry as 'small and relatively unimportant' wielding little political influence (p. 262), despite Marsh previously pointing to the 'remarkable proliferation' of Australian-based think tanks (1994, p. 178). The authors identify several institutional obstacles impeding the development of the Australian industry. Nevertheless, since the publication of their study, the industry has

flourished. Halpin and Fraussen (2017, p. 121), for instance, show that 50 per cent of the Australian think tank population was founded after 2004. Chapter Four of the present thesis details a similar progression. Given this evolution, the present thesis re-examines the legitimacy of these supposed developmental obstacles. Chapter Five shows that they no longer endure.

As a prolific think tank scholar, it is instructive to note Diane Stone's evolving interpretations of think tank relevance and impacts. In 2017, Stone and Ladi accepted that influence might actually be observable, stating that think tank 'strategies to *directly* affect the course of a piece of legislation, or the wording of policy initiatives, must be considered alongside efforts at longer-term, indirect, and subtle influence over discourses of governance' (p. 325, italics added). This contention starkly contrasts with Stone's earlier suppositions, perhaps suggesting that think tanks have carved out a more prominent role in the policy process. Part Three of this thesis assesses whether think tanks do indeed have a more direct impact on policymaking.

There are important works relevant to the present study away from Marsh and Stone. Paul 't Hart and Ariadne Vromen (2008, p. 139) note the fast-evolving Australian think tank landscape and suggest that think tank ideas have progressively become 'more visible, debated and considered.' In an increasingly networked environment, the authors assert that it is no longer sufficient for think tanks to produce weighty tomes and expect to persuade policymaking. Instead, think tanks need to elevate their policymaker engagement and extend their organisational connectedness if they covet continued relevance. Importantly, the authors also note the paucity of empirical studies attempting to evidence think tank impacts and urge scholars to undertake more systematic investigations of influence, particularly in an Australian context. The present study is substantially motivated by 't Hart and Vromen's findings and seeks to empirically evidence think tank influence on specific policy issues in Part Three.

In their study on the development of strategic policy initiatives, Bert Fraussen and Darren Halpin (2017) assert that think tanks in Australia have the potential to contribute to strategic policymaking, but organisational characteristics are crucial determinants of their effectiveness. The present thesis extensively expands on this theme and considers think tank characteristics (such as research capacity, as supported by entity resources) to be significant

variables impacting the 'power' of these actors. This study's analytical framework explicitly incorporates this important dimension.

Over the past two decades, much of the Australian literature has centred on the prosecution of right-leaning think tanks. The present thesis eschews normative deliberations, but the musings of successive scholars on this narrower theme demand attention. Philip Mendes (2003) examines the rise of 'neo-liberal' policy institutes and asserts that they have played a consequential role in moving the Australian policy environment to the right. Mendes focuses on two prominent institutes – the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) – and characterises their influence as 'substantial' (pp. 44, 47). Importantly, Mendes positions these two institutes as principled interlocutors with ties to both major Australian political parties who 'are rarely side-tracked by short-term pragmatic political concerns or alliances' (Mendes, 2003, p. 32). Right-wing think tanks are often characterised as working in lock-step with the Coalition government, but Mendes suggests this characterisation is unmerited – a contention supported in the present thesis.

Damien Cahill (2004) pursues the theme of right-wing hegemony with a full-length study that positions the IPA and CIS (amongst others) as part of an 'elite social movement' providing 'radical neo-liberals' with 'organisational backbone' (p. 2). Cahill particularly highlights the 'radical right's' media penetration and suggests that the media's complicity has enabled the mainstreaming of views that otherwise possess little public support (pp. 231-271). Cahill and Beder (2005) more specifically litigate the impact of neo-liberal policy institutes on government policy measures. They assert that the IPA (in particular) developed the intellectual justification and provided policy legitimation for pro-business, neo-liberal projects through their efforts to 'soften up the public' (pp. 6-7). Marcus Smith and Peter Marden (2008, p. 715) follow similar themes and assert that neo-liberal institutes have become the dominant intellectual voice in Australian public policy debates and decry the 'state of the forums' (that is, the traditional media) which enable these debates. The present-day dominance of the Murdoch press arguably leaves these circumstances unchanged. But if the media landscape for political organisations has evolved in line with Vromen's (2017, p. 101) proclamation that 'social media is everything', a revision of these sentiments is in order. The present thesis extensively explores think tank media strategies in Chapter Seven.

Andrew Thackrah (2012) continues the pursuit of right-leaning institutes and specifically considers the relationship between 'neo-liberal think tanks' and the Liberal Party government

of John Howard (1996-2007). Like Mendes (2003), Thackrah identifies persistent intellectual disputes between the Howard government and neo-liberal think tanks and points to a fractured relationship based on 'key philosophical differences' (p. 192).[11]

Finally, Dominic Kelly (2017) advances the Australian literature by detailing the rise of four conservative groups and (according to Kelly) their pivotal role in the rightward reorientation of Australia's political, social and economic landscape in the late twentieth century.[12] Kelly investigates the audacious goals and activities of these four 'hard right' entities but cautiously assesses that their influence is 'incremental and indirect' and difficult to directly discern (pp. 100, 183). Kelly highlights the lengthy gestation period for non-mainstream views to become credible counter-arguments on certain policy issues.[13] He argues that his reference entities redefined political debates over the long-term by specifically targeting public opinion, in addition to their more direct efforts to influence politicians' perspectives (Kelly, 2017, pp. 59-60, 86, 163). Kelly's assertions comport with prior findings that suggest that think tank's purposeful cultivation of a desired narrative can transform political and public opinion on policy issues (see, for example, Dahl, 1970, p. 257; Stone, 2000, pp. 61-62; Abelson, 2006, pp. 166, 227). Nevertheless, Part Three of the present thesis also demonstrates that think tanks can be effective over shorter time-frames by aggressively targeting policy formulation.

Themes

Research on the Australian think tank industry remains thin despite a full four decades passing since Ian Marsh's ground-breaking study in 1980. One of the key themes in the Australian literature (prior to the past decade) is the relative under-development of the Australian industry, and, as such, analyses have focussed on the impediments preventing a more vibrant

[11] Lingard (2015) and Reid (2015) also examine right-leaning think tanks and their impacts on education policy in Australia. Both characterise the 'research' produced by two institutes (the CIS and the Education Standards Institute) as poorly conceived and lacking sophistication. Loughland and Thompson (2016) likewise analyse the education-policy prescriptions of a single entity – but in this case, those of the centrist Grattan Institute. The authors pejoratively label Grattan's research 'simplistic' and 'exaggerated' and ultimately assert that think tanks need to be held accountable for their 'simple policy prescriptions' (pp. 126-127). The present thesis performs an in-depth case study on school funding policy and systematically assesses the veracity of the accompanying influence claims.

[12] Kelly's study focuses on the H.R. Nicholls Society, the Samuel Griffith Society, the Bennelong Society and the Lavoisier Group.

[13] This claim is consistent with a central tenet of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's (1993) advocacy coalition framework, which is contemplated throughout this thesis.

Australian industry. A second prominent theme is the emphasis on the rise and impact of so-called neo-liberal institutes. The focus here usefully illuminates the strategic objectives of these ideological entities. That is, existing studies show that right-leaning institutes' long-term focus on persuading public opinion has been an effective way to realise their preferences. Finally, the Australian literature persistently emphasises the importance of the media in enabling right-leaning think tanks and their associated ideas. The present thesis investigates these themes in greater detail – along with the themes in the foundational literature – in later chapters.

2.4 Core Concepts

This section focuses on three enduring features of think tank research. First, the section discusses think tank conceptualisations along with the thorny issue of organisational independence. Second, the section discusses the think tank typologies that help to demonstrate industry heterogeneity and the divergent methods think tanks employ. Finally, the section considers the prominent theories used to explain the influence of think tanks and their space in the social structure.

2.4.1 Definitional Debates

It has been commonplace for scholars to propose unique conceptualisations of think tanks. Some of this definitional variation stems from divergent national political structures and the extent of government sponsorship of 'independent' policy advice. Indeed, many governments establish quasi-independent ('in-house') institutes to provide policy research and analyse policy solutions. These varied circumstances result in a lack of jurisdictional portability for some definitions. This thesis does not argue that one definition is fundamentally superior to another but adopts James McGann's (2016) definition because it appropriately captures those entities that pursue policy-relevant research in Australia. Importantly, McGann's conceptualisation permits the inclusion of both government- and university-affiliated institutes.

Andrew Rich (1999) and James McGann (2016) proffer the two definitions that capture the essence of the discord. Scholars have consistently gravitated toward these incarnations

due to the prominence of Rich's study and the institutionalisation of McGann's definition.[14] Specifically, Rich (1999, p. 19) asserts that think tanks are:

> Independent, non-interest-based, non-profit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policy making process.

Alternatively, McGann (2016, p. 10) proposes that think tanks are:

> Public policy research, analysis, and engagement institutions that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues that enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues. Think tanks may be affiliated with a political party, a university, or a government; they are independent institutions that are structured as permanent bodies, not ad hoc commissions.

Both definitions contain similar elements – emphasising an institute's policy focus – but differ in one significant way. Rich (1999, pp. 18-19) explicitly excludes university- and government-affiliated entities from his conceptualisation. McGann's definition explicitly allows their inclusion.

The divergence hinges on the notion of independence. For Rich, entities that do not possess legal or organisational independence are unlikely to possess intellectual independence. He contends that 'the seriousness with which think tank research and ideas are taken depends on their being viewed as independent of specific interests or agendas' (Rich, 1999, p. 20). On the other hand, McGann believes that such definitions are 'too narrow' and that 'excluding such affiliated organizations would convey the illusion that certain countries do not have any' (McGann, 2016, pp. 9-10). Australia demonstrably possesses policy-oriented research institutes within universities and the Australian Public Service, both of whom perform the same function as other unaffiliated institutes. It would be ill-considered to exclude them from this study.

Dickson (1972, p. 261) provides antecedent support for this rationale. He refers to the 'think tank' designation as 'ill-defined, subjective' and 'vague' but asserts that an institute's *role* should guide decisions on population inclusiveness (Dickson, 1972, pp. 26-28). It is with this assertion in mind that the present study opts for McGann's definition.

[14] McGann's definition has become institutionalised through its use in his broadly cited *Global Go-To Think Tank Index* (McGann, 2018).

Kelly (2017) raises several other organisational features that impact classification decisions. He classifies the four entities in his study as single-issue advocacy groups, whereas the present study would classify all four as think tanks.[15] Kelly (2017, pp. 228-229, 260) posits that while they all possess think tank-like characteristics, such a classification would be ill-judged. His reasons are numerous: the groups focus on a single-policy sphere; they have a purely ideological approach; they produce polemical content rather than legitimate research; they have no significant research capacity; their resources are minimal; and they are largely run by volunteers. But each of these issues is readily contestable.

First, the focus on a single policy area is not unusual for think tanks – it is instead common (see, J. Smith, 1991, p. 215; Stone, 1993, pp. 38, 40; Rich, 2004, p. 17; McGann, 2007, p. 67; Halpin and Binderkrantz, 2011, p. 216). Second, engaging in advocacy has long been an accepted (if not always a welcome) think tank practice (see Weaver, 1989, p. 567; Abelson, 2009, p. 20). Third, think tanks need not be 'equipped with multiple staff who are paid to produce research' (Kelly, 2017, p. 228). Resource allocations are largely irrelevant when it comes to defining think tanks. Think tanks are both large and small, operating with multiple employees, as sole traders, or purely with volunteers. More than anything, these classification issues highlight the difficulties in evolving a broadly accepted conceptualisation of this organisational species.

Some further comments regarding the concept of independence are worthwhile. Medvetz (2014, pp. 31-33) convincingly argues that organisational independence should not be conflated with intellectual independence. It is indeed debatable as to why one would question the intellectual independence of policy advice provided by government- or university-affiliated entities versus those policy prescriptions advocated by overtly ideological, even partisan, entities funded by private corporate donations. On this point, Stahl (2016, p. 58) vividly illustrates how structurally independent entities can still have their intellectual independence challenged. But it is Abelson and Brooks (2018, p. 3) who neatly summarise the evolution of thought regarding the doctrine of independence, simply stating that 'it no longer makes very much sense to restrict the definition to "independent" [entities].'

[15] Only two of the four entities remain going concerns.

2.4.2 Typologies

Think tank scholarship has similarly diverged on typological classification. Some scholars have championed the utility of typologies (see, for example, McGann, 1991, 2016), but others have rejected their usefulness (see, for example, Medvetz, 2014). Indeed, Medvetz (2014, p. 169) contends that think tank 'typologies miss the forest for the trees' and are relatively arbitrary. But it is broadly accepted that think tank categorisations are contestable. For example, Weaver (1989, p. 563) notes the 'inherent tensions' in his widely cited typology. Likewise, Abelson (2009, p. 21) states 'problems can arise in making such classifications […] since some organisations possess characteristics common to more than one type of think tank.' Nevertheless, these theoretical categories enable scholars to simplify the think tank universe and examine divergent think tank influence strategies. Typologies augment the understanding of the institutional landscape rather than 'artificially cleansing the [industry] of its blurriness' as Medvetz claims (2014, p. 215).

Policy institute classification has been a feature of the scholarship since Dickson (1972), but it was not until Weaver (1989) that a dedicated effort was made to synopsise the industry's structure. Weaver suggests three main think tank classifications: universities without students, contract research organisations and advocacy tanks.[16] This typology has been refined over the ensuing years but it remains popular in its original form for its parsimony and enduring applicability (McGann, 2016, p. 14).

McGann (1991, pp. 162, 167) built on Weaver's (1989) typology and proposed seven categories to accommodate his identification of these 'new organizational forms'. Nevertheless, the present thesis employs McGann's more recent four-category framework as an organising tool (McGann, 2016, p. 15). Table 2.1 presents a modified version of this four-category typology, and augments it with a 'forum' category to expressly distinguish those institutes that represent policy *engagement* organisations, in contrast to those focusing on research and analysis.

[16] Critchlow (1985, p. 4) previously invoked the 'university without students' phraseology.

Table 2-1 - Think tank typologies

Think tank type	Staffing	Products and product style	Examples
Academic / University without students	Staff with academic credentials and muted ideology	Academic monographs, thick research reports, and journal articles	Grattan Institute; Lowy Institute
Contract researcher	Staff with academic credentials, muted ideology, and objective, non-partisan research	Thick reports for government departments and other clients in objective and non-partisan style	Productivity Commission; Australian Institute of Criminology
Advocacy tank	Staff with political or philosophical credentials	Reports plus brief papers typically focused on current issues	The Australia Institute; Institute of Public Affairs
Party think tank	Focus on party members and party loyalty	Varies	Chifley Research Centre; Menzies Research Centre
Forum for discussion	Varies	Events and seminars	Australian Institute of International Affairs; Sydney Institute

Adapted from McGann (2016)

Chapter Four later demonstrates that this five-category typology concisely captures the full breadth of the Australian think tank industry. This thesis accepts that the boundaries within this typology are porous, but the typology helps to provide context regarding the industry's structure and methods.

2.4.3 Theories

This section briefly discusses the three dominant theories – the elite model, the pluralist perspective, and network approaches – used to explain think tanks influence and position in the broader social structure. Although the present thesis does not examine the conformity of the Australian think tank industry to these theories, the main elements of each are set out in support of the study's multi-theoretical analytical framework. Observations regarding the applicability of each theory are made in Part Three of this thesis, particularly in the concluding chapter.

The Elite Model

C. Wright Mills (1959) extensively shaped early elite theory. He contends that a power elite, consisting of the executive branch of government, titans of the corporate world, and increasingly powerful military leaders, has established an unchallenged authority over the consequential levers of society. For Mills, this power elite has plundered America's traditional

social structure. The resultant centralised control structure has left mass society politically impotent and largely bereft of agency (Mills, 1959, p. 324).

Although Mills' early work does not specifically distinguish think tanks, his thesis suggests that they would be on 'the outermost fringes of the power elite' as part of 'those who count' rather than being an indispensable part of the core elite grouping (p. 290). But later, G. William Domhoff (1967) more explicitly positions think tanks as part of an elite group that possesses a 'strong and never-ending influence on the shape' of policymaking (1967, p. 63). Think tanks (implied in Domhoff's 'association' institution) serve to further the interests of their corporate benefactors by influencing government policy and choreographing public opinion (1967, pp. 63, 148). Domhoff asserts that associations are 'arms of the power elite which have the function of attempting to influence the framework of American policy' (Domhoff, 1967, p. 77) – an enduring theme in the think tank literature.

Thomas Dye (1978) advances elite deliberations by proposing an 'oligarchic model' to explain *how* elites operationalise their power. Dye (pp. 310-311) asserts that policy-planning organizations occupy a dominant space in the social structure whereby they coordinate and deploy the varied contributions of corporations, intellectuals, the media, and government officials to influence policymaking (a theme that Medvetz (2014) seems to later leverage).

Abelson (2009, pp. 50-52) assesses elite theorists' contributions in his examination of think tank influence and concludes that the theory does not adequately explain think tanks' abilities to influence policy or how they might do so. The present thesis demonstrates that Abelson's contentions regarding the applicability of elite theory mainly persist in the Australian think tank market.

The Pluralist Perspective[17]

Political pluralism locates think tanks as one of many voices in an ideas marketplace (a concept that Thomas Healy (2014) traces to a consequential US Supreme Court ruling in 1919). Pluralists assert that political decisions are informed by a competitive process where organisations and groups advance competing ideas to influence policy evolution.

E.E. Schattschneider (1935) proposes a biased pluralism where the privileged position enjoyed by economic groups affords them benefits unlikely to accrue to an 'apathetic' public

[17] This section does not engage with the enormous body of more contemporary interest group literature. Instead, the remainder of this thesis discusses such studies, where appropriate.

(p. 286). His thesis suggests that think tanks should attempt to *directly* influence government decision-makers if they are to effectively compete with these privileged groups (on biased pluralism, see Gilens and Page, 2014, p. 567). Nelson Polsby (1960) contends that the pluralist approach has obvious application, rejecting so-called 'stratification' theses that imagine powerful groups (an elite) dominating society. Truman (1967) similarly seeks to explain the role of groups in America's political process. The present thesis contemplates Truman's ideas surrounding the supposed advantages to groups who mobilise to defend a policy status quo (p. 353). This potential impediment to policy change is important to think tanks given that they rarely deploy resources to safeguard a status quo.

Robert Dahl (1970) is recognised as one of the intellectual originators of political pluralism (see Domhoff, 1967; Lukes, 2005, pp. 15-18) and, although he does not specifically discuss think tanks, he elucidates the forces that facilitate think tank influence. Dahl examines how the distribution of resources enable some actors to exercise more influence than others and how the evolving political, social and economic landscape permits the ascendancy of disparate groups. The present thesis extensively probes the importance of resource endowment, as it confronts the tenets of both elite theory and the pluralist tradition. Dahl (1970, p. 89) also highlights the importance of political access when interrogating the policy influence of external actors. He determines that having a seat at the table – or at least setting the table – matters. He further contends that attempts to influence public opinion via the media are important determinants of group success (p. 257). Both of these themes (*how* groups influence) are central to any discussion on think tanks.

The pluralist perspective is now ordinarily invoked in the examination of the policy process. But Abelson (2009, pp. 52-54) challenges the usefulness of the pluralist approach, asserting that it cannot explain why these unique entities might succeed in influencing policy. Subsequent literature examining group policy capacities substantially address this perceived weakness (see, for example, Grossmann, 2012; Halpin, 2014; Wu et al., 2018).

Network Approaches

Policy network approaches have largely displaced the elite and pluralist models as the predominant theories employed to explain the role and position of think tanks, and how and why they might influence policymaking (see John, 2012, pp. 78-79 for a broader explanation on the ascendancy of network approaches). There are numerous variants under the policy

network banner, but their common claim – that policymaking results from the formal and informal relationships and interactions between different societal actors – distinguishes this group of theories (Rhodes, 2010, p. 426). This section briefly considers three network approaches (later applied in Part Three of this thesis).[18]

Hugh Heclo (1978) is recognised as the progenitor of modern network theory, having labelled earlier models that purportedly explain policymaking as 'disastrously incomplete' (Heclo, 1978, p. 88; John, 2012, p. 71). Heclo's 'issue networks' imagines many (and fluid) participants in the policy process, all with varying levels of political access and with divergent levels of political power and resources (Rhodes, 2010; John, 2012).

Peter Haas (1992) envisages policy networks, or so-called 'epistemic communities', consisting of knowledge professionals with shared beliefs and common understandings of causal relationships germane to their issue field (p. 3). Haas specifically identifies think tanks as members of this specialist community and suggests that the demand-driven ascendancy of these communities renders them powerful voices in the policy process (pp. 4, 31).

Paul Sabatier (1987) also seeks to explain policy change by including actor belief systems as a central component of his 'Advocacy Coalition Framework' (Sabatier further developed this Framework with Jenkins-Smith; see Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). The authors envisage policymakers being motivated by their deep core beliefs, which generate 'a variety of cognitive biases and constraints' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999, p. 131). Members of an advocacy coalition purposefully interact and seek to influence policy issues over an extended period – a key differentiating feature of the advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 25; 1999, p. 136). The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) also diverges from the epistemic community concept in relation to member attributes. Whereas Haas demands identifiable expertise, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith permit members with varying levels of knowledge.

Think tanks sit comfortably within each of these network models, suggesting that determinations of model compatibility (when assessing policy cases) depend on the environment in which think tanks operate and individual think tank's activities and intentions. This thesis' multi-theoretical framework permits the parallel consideration of all three of these theoretical models. Chapter Twelve (this thesis' concluding chapter) makes some

[18] The variations and augmentations of these three approaches are acknowledged, but the focus on these foundational models is consistent with the broader thrust of this literature review.

observations on the applicability of each of these three network theories. The concluding chapter also reflects upon the applicability of two additional policy process theories – Baumgartner and Jones' (2009) Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Kingdon's (2011) Multiple Streams Framework. These two theories (along with the ACF) are particularly relevant because they explicitly inform the Shiffman and Smith (2007) analytical framework central to this study (Chapter Three discusses this framework in further detail).

Baumgartner and Jones' (2009) Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) models the policy process by allowing for both policy stability and policy change. The authors assert that policymaking processes typically allow for only incremental policy accommodations, where instead the status quo is favoured in particular policy subsystems. But periods of stasis are punctuated by large-scale changes in public policy when the macropolitical environment is destabilised and policy issues are thrust upon the broader political agenda. These circumstances are characterised by collapsing philosophical monopolies in policy subsystems (pp. 5-7). Issues are redefined in adjacent policy venues and a broader range of actors advance policy images that upset the status quo, sometimes leading to substantial policy change (Baumgartner et al., 2017, p. 62).

Kingdon's (2011) Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) examines how issues ascend to the public policy agenda. He invokes three related, but independent, processes – termed the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream – to explain why some issues attract policymakers' attention while other policy proposals fail to catch fire. For a public policy issue to gain prominence (which can then precipitate policy change), these three streams need to 'couple' via a 'policy window' (Kingdon, 2011, pp. 165-195; Herweg et al., 2017, p. 20). Successful coupling occurs when a policy window opens (which might result from a focusing event) and policy entrepreneurs are able to advance viable solutions to policy problems in an evolving political environment (see also, Beeson and Stone, 2013). Agenda change (and perhaps policy change) ensues when the streams converge, enabling policymakers to act in accordance with the evolving 'national mood'.

These prominent theories are core to the study of the policy process. But to be clear, this thesis does not directly examine or seek to explain the policy process. Nor does it engage in theory-testing. The theories briefly discussed in the present chapter – including those that explain think tanks influence and position in the social structure (elite, pluralist and network theories), those that might position think tanks as part of broader policy

networks (issue networks, epistemic communities, and the ACF), and those that might include think tanks in the broader policy process (PET and MSF, along with the ACF) – are not subject to comprehensive examination. The analytical focus of this thesis is on the influence of think tanks on policymaking in Australia. This focus necessarily engages these theories, and observations on particular elements of these theories are proffered throughout the thesis (particularly in the concluding Chapter Twelve). But the thesis does not purport to examine any of these theories systematically.[19]

[19] Lindquist (2021, pp. 101, 103) encourages scholars to more explicitly connect research on think tanks to long-established policy process theories so as to augment the understanding of these amorphous entities, and broader policymaking processes. Lindquist (p. 113) goes on to assert that 'there has been almost no systematic research informed by the ACF [in particular] on how think tanks influence policymaking.' The present thesis seeks to establish the foundations for future research of this kind (in the Australian context).

Chapter Three: Research Design

3.1 The Research Question

This thesis examines think tank influence on policymaking in Australia.[20] Think tanks are non-governmental participants in the policymaking process and attempt to play decisive roles by defining issues, informing opinions, setting agendas, and influencing both the policy environment and policy outcomes.[21] Non-governmental actor involvement in the political process has received extensive scholarly attention (see, for example, Schattschneider, 1935; Truman, 1967; Dahl, 1970; Halpin, 1999; Baumgartner et al., 2009; Gilens and Page, 2014). But despite their burgeoning numbers and overt claims of success, there has been no comprehensive examination of the Australian think tank industry in almost three decades.[22] The historically modest profile of the Australian industry has failed to arouse broad scholarly interest beyond those contributions discussed in Chapter Two. A systematic exploration of the following question will therefore yield an important contribution to the Australian political science literature.

What influence do think tanks exert on policymaking in Australia?

Some observers are willing to accept the reality of think tank influence based on the congruence of think tank policy prescriptions with associated policy outcomes. For example, in *The Fifth Estate: Think Tanks, Public Policy and Governance*, James McGann presents fourteen case studies that purportedly demonstrate how think tanks 'influence the final decisions' made by the US government (McGann, 2016, p. 79). McGann attaches great importance to think tanks' role in the resolution of the identified issues but presents only limited evidence to substantiate those claims. While McGann does evidence consistencies between the eventual policy outcomes and the measures that think tanks advanced, it is

[20] Policymaking refers to the process of establishing public policies, which 'encompasses a flow and pattern of action that extends over time and includes many decisions.' Public policies are 'developed by governmental bodies and officials' and represent 'relatively stable, purposive courses of action or inaction followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern' (Anderson, 2011, pp. 6, 7, 19).

[21] Following Anderson (2011, p. 40), the policy environment encompasses the broad context and circumstances under which policy is made. Policy outcomes are identifiable measures or actions – such as rules, regulations, and legislation – which formalise decisions made by government officials.

[22] Stone (1993) conducted the last comprehensive study when the Australian industry was in its infancy.

imprudent to presume the exertion of influence in the absence of methodical process tracing, actor testimony, and the consideration of other actor involvement (see Yin, 2014, pp. 201-204). The extent to which think tanks persuasively impact the path of policy requires a systematic examination.

Few Australian scholars have directly scrutinised think tank influence. Noting this absence, Vromen and Hurley (2015, p. 179) assert that 'future research into think tanks […] needs to focus more deeply on the actual influence of think tanks [on] policymaking in Australia.' The present study's central research question seeks to specifically tackle this issue by empirically examining selected policy cases. This thesis tests the veracity of think tank claims and examines the circumstances under which think tanks are influential.

Three supplementary questions support the central research question. The first two supplementary questions ask:

What is the structure of the Australian think tank industry?

What are the characteristics of the industry participants?

Part Two of this thesis (Chapters Four to Eight) extensively addresses these two questions, providing the essential knowledge required for the Part Three case studies. Truman (1967) argues for a detailed analysis of the structure, dynamics and behaviours of groups, stating that it is 'upon these foundations [that] we can begin to develop a meaningful conception of the role of political groups in the governing process' (p. 13). The present study follows Truman and investigates think tanks' structural features, strategic objectives, policy foci, resource endowments, political philosophies, and the environment in which they operate. In short, these two supplementary research questions encourage a detailed examination of all features of the Australian think tank industry.

The third supplementary question asks:

How and who do think tanks attempt to influence?

This supplementary question is an indispensable companion to the central research question. It is important to understand the methods think tanks use before attempting to explain whether their influence efforts are successful. This supplementary question also invites the

examination of think tank engagement at various points along the policy cycle.[23] Determining how think tanks attempt to influence naturally accompanies a determination of when they seek to do so.

The central research question is more directly prosecuted once these three supplementary questions have established the context, objectives, and capacity of think tanks to influence policymaking.

3.2 Influence Conceptualisations

In *Who Rules America?*, G. William Domhoff (1967, p. 11) posits that influence 'implies that a person can sometimes sway, persuade, or otherwise have an effect upon those who control from a position of authority.' This conceptualisation substantially captures the phenomenon investigated in the present study. That is, this study examines think tank effects on the deliberations and actions of policymakers.[24] Domhoff's influence conceptualisation is compatible with this inquiry's inductive approach and it is used in this study to assess think tank policy influence.

Domhoff adopts an elite perspective in his assessment of influence. His thesis might therefore suggest that influence is substantially perpetrated on a direct basis (via a 'power elite' within connected institutions).[25] But Domhoff explicitly recognises attempts by elite 'associations' to directly *and* indirectly influence policymakers (pp. 63, 148). He also allows for elites impacts on the policy environment via their influence on public opinion (pp. 112-113). So, although Domhoff builds his thesis around the control and influence of a power elite, his influence definition is flexible enough to allow for the emergence of competing theories.

[23] This thesis defines the 'policy cycle' as the steps or processes through which official and non-governmental actors pursue activities and actions to establish public policy. The stages model of the policy process is presented as a simplifying framework in this study. Harold Lasswell (1956) pioneered this structured approach to policy cycle analysis, although this study prefers Anderson's (2011, pp. 3-6) simplified model to Lasswell's sequential seven-step model.

[24] This thesis follows Anderson (2011, p. 48) and defines official policymakers as 'those with the legal authority to engage in the formation of public policy'. Official policymakers include primary policymakers who 'have direct constitutional authority to act' and supplementary policymakers who 'operate on the basis of authority granted by others'. Supplementary policymakers more broadly include those working in the public service. This thesis uses the term 'policymakers' to refer to 'official policymakers'; that is, primary and supplementary policymakers in aggregate (see also, Lindblom and Woodhouse, 1993, p. 59).

[25] This thesis defines direct influence as the influence that results from non-intermediated interactions between experts and policymakers. Indirect influence arises when experts influence policymakers via third parties – typically the public (where the media serves as an enabler of that indirect influence).

It is instructive to reflect upon other influence conceptualisations advanced by think tank scholars. Andrew Rich (2004, p. 153) defines influence as 'success by experts in making their own work known among a set of policy makers so that it informs their thinking on, or public articulation of, policy relevant information.' Rich's definition allows for both direct and indirect influence and for influence on the policy environment and policy outcomes.

Importantly, neither Domhoff nor Rich require that policy measures be adopted or legislated to evidence influence. Rich (2004, p. 153) notes that numerous constraints may prevent an otherwise influential proposal from becoming legislated policy. The two definitions merely require that think tanks discernibly impact policymaker deliberations. For think tanks, 'swaying, persuading or having an effect upon' policymakers ('those who control') is a fundamental objective. Indeed, as this study later demonstrates, it is what defines the industry. Both definitions thus countenance influence across the entire policy cycle.

Domhoff's definition is favoured here because it introduces phrasing that neatly captures the full range of think tank impacts. Think tank influence might be subtle, 'swaying' the understanding of a policymaker. It might 'persuade' a policymaker on the merits of a particular proposal. Or it might 'have an effect upon' a legislator's vote in parliament. But to be clear, this thesis does not adopt an elite perspective (as per Domhoff). This thesis considers 'those who control' to be policymakers, not members of Domhoff's 'upper class'. Domhoff's thesis is neither tested nor championed here. While his conceptualisation of influence has great utility, only limited judgements are made regarding his broader argument (in Chapter Twelve).

The present study is open to evidence of direct or indirect influence, on the policy environment or policy outcomes, and at an early or later stage of the policy cycle. Domhoff (1967, p. 11) equally allows for cases distinguished by directly observable influence, and cases where think tanks ('associations') define issues, set agendas, and persuade debates in the public sphere. But Domhoff (1967, p. 7) also urges caution when attempting to identify influence, stating that 'even when the information with which to reconstruct a specific decision seems to be available, it is a very risky and tricky business.' Central to these difficulties are the challenges in precisely defining influence and tracing the source of policy ideas. Systematic investigations of influence claims will therefore facilitate more robust inferences.

3.3 Research Philosophy

Think tank influence is the phenomenon central to this study. It can be examined in varying ways, each with implications for the study's design, methods, and results interpretations. This study employs the critical realist approach to leverage key elements of both positivism and interpretivism (Bhaskar, 1978, 1989). The approach combines a positivist ontology – which asserts that a real-world exists independent of our knowledge of it – and an interpretivist epistemology – where social constructions play an essential role in determining outcomes (Halperin and Heath, 2017, pp. 27-44; D. Marsh et al., 2018, pp. 177-188). Critical realism allows for the reality (or possibility) of think tank influence even though it might be an unobservable phenomenon. That is, the concept of influence is inherently unobservable, but it might be possible to identify the consequences of communicative interactions between think tanks and their influence targets. Think tanks' directly observable outputs (for example, research publications or parliamentary submissions) do not offer a complete, nor likely accurate, picture of their influence. The critical realist philosophy – encompassing both material and ideational factors – allows researchers to proffer a more complete explanation of the phenomenon under investigation (Patomaki and Wight, 2000, p. 235).

This thesis surmises that influence exertion is the generative mechanism that links think tanks to policy*making* (Bhaskar, 1978, p. 46). This generative (or causal) mechanism acts as an intervening variable through which consequences or observed events are affected (Zachariadis et al., 2013, p. 859). Gerring (2012, pp. 215-216) emphasises that a causal mechanism can be any factor and does not need to be observable in and of itself – wholly consistent with the postulations here.

Critical realists use the process of retroduction to identify theoretical explanations for phenomena of interest (Bhaskar, 1978, pp. 125, 135-136). Carolyn Oliver (2012, p. 380) asserts that retroduction is 'abduction with a specific question in mind', while Denzin (1978, pp. 109-110) earlier describes abductive processes as 'working from consequence back to cause.' Retroduction therefore seeks the most plausible generative mechanism for particular circumstances, events, or outcomes. The present thesis operationalises retroduction using the process tracing technique in the Part Three case studies.

This study does not seek to test or build a theory to explain the role and behaviours of think tanks. It seeks to explain whether think tanks purposive actions influence the

deliberations and behaviours of Australian policymakers. The tenets of critical realism inform the methods and techniques used in the pursuit of that objective.

3.4 Analytical Framework

This thesis demonstrates that think tanks primarily seek to influence policymaking. This influence is broadly defined and is not narrowly restricted to 'empirically observable effects' which illustrate a 'control over outcomes' (see Dur and De Bievre, 2007, p. 3). Halpin (2014, p. 30) more appropriately suggests that interest group influence 'is likely exercised at a multitude of stages in [the] policy process.' Following Halpin, the framework adopted here must allow for influence assessments across the entire policy cycle.

This study uses Jeremy Shiffman and Stephanie Smith's (2007) analytical framework to examine think tank policy influence. Shiffman and Smith (2007) originally developed their framework to analyse the political priority of global health initiatives, but it has since been applied to separate policy issues in Australia (see Baker et al., 2017; Jones, 2020). In the present context, the framework suits the assessment and explanation of think tank influence at the issue level. Halpin and Fraussen (2017, pp. 723-724) assert that influence is best tested at the issue level, consistent with Baumgartner et al. (2009) and Binderkrantz et al. (2014). Suitably, the Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework allows for the examination of distinct issues in separate policy fields and across different policy arenas.

The framework is multi-theoretical, thereby allowing the assessment of individual issues under alternate models (Baker et al., 2017, p. 143). Shiffman and Smith (2007) channel theory from Baumgartner et al. (2009), Kingdon (2011), and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999), and propose eleven different factors across four separate dimensions to determine 'the factors shaping political priority' (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, p. 1371). These elements can be readily adapted to determine whether – and to what extent – think tanks exert influence on particular policy issues. That is, the framework inherently considers the conditions that facilitate cause-and-effect relationships between think tanks and policymakers (on causal-mechanistic perspectives, see van der Heijden et al., 2021). Table 3.1 details the Shiffman and Smith framework and its accompanying analytical elements. The present study augments the original Shiffman and Smith model by including exemplar questions that focus its application on the determination of influence.

Table 3-1: Analytical framework

Dimension	Description	Factors impacting actors' policy influence
Issue Characteristics	Features of the debate or issue	1. Credible indicators: clear measures that show the severity of the problem, and can be used to monitor progress 2. Severity: the size of the burden relative to other problems, as indicated by objective measures 3. Effective interventions: the extent to which the proposed means of addressing the problem are clearly explained, cost effective, backed by evidence, and implementable
Political Context	The political environment in which actors operate	4. Policy windows: political moments when conditions align favourably for an issue solution, presenting opportunities for advocates to influence decisionmakers 5. Governance structures: the degree to which norms and institutions operating in a sector provide a platform for effective action
Actor Power	The strengths of the individuals and organisations concerned with the issue	6. Policy community cohesion: the degree of coalescence among the network of individuals and organisations that are centrally involved with the issue 7. Leadership: the presence of individuals capable of uniting the policy community and acknowledged as particularly strong champions for the cause 8. Guiding institutions: the effectiveness of organisations or coordinating mechanisms with a mandate to lead the initiative 9. Civil society mobilisation: the extent to which grassroots organisations have mobilised to press political authorities to address the issue
Ideas	The ways in which those involved with the issue understand and portray it	10. Internal frame: the degree to which the policy community agrees on the definition of, causes of, and solutions to the problem 11. External frame: public portrayals of the issue in ways that indirectly resonate with political authorities

Adapted from Shiffman and Smith (2007)

Shiffman and Smith (2007, p. 1370) use their framework to evaluate the evolved status of their policy issue. The authors assert that a political priority is 'the degree to which […] political leaders actively give attention to an issue, and back up that attention with the provision of financial, technical and human resources that are commensurate with the severity of the issue.' Policy measures are enacted as a consequence of this political priority. Baker et al. (2017, p. 142) subsequently assert that 'political attention is a necessary but insufficient condition for political action'. However, both authors conflate 'political priorities' with *policy* action.

The present thesis modifies Shiffman and Smith's (2007) original taxonomy and separates the concept of 'political priority' into two distinct components. As the first component, a *political* priority represents 'the extent to which political leaders respond to the issue by mobilising official institutions and wider political systems' (consistent with Baker et al., 2017, p. 142). The interpretation in the present thesis is that this mobilisation might, for example, include official government inquiries or committee hearings ('official institutions')

but might not result in policy formulation or policy change. As the second component, a *policy* priority is imagined to encompass a specifically identifiable policy response or action. That is, where government interventions are formalised via official policy proposals (a proposed law) or policy changes (rules, regulations or legislation), and resources are allocated to address the issue. In sum, this thesis asserts that policy issues can progress from attracting political attention, to become political priorities, which might then become policy priorities. This distinction is usefully sympathetic to the activities of opposition political parties, recognising that they have fewer pathways to formal policy action, but can nevertheless generate political priorities.

To be sure, Shiffman and Smith (2007) use their framework to explain why some issues simply attract political attention while others become political priorities. The present thesis proffers a modified taxonomy – while using the same analytical dimensions – to extend the classification of an issue's evolved status (to political priorities *and* policy priorities). In other words, this study places additional emphasis on think tanks influence on policy processes, in addition to their impacts on policy outcomes (Betsill and Corell, 2008). This thesis seeks to explain how think tanks influence the evolution of policy issues: do they help bring attention to the issue, steer it to the status of political priority, or drive it to become a policy priority? Of course, a policy issue may evolve into a policy priority where a think tank has no influence at all, despite its best efforts. Table 3.2 illustrates how issues are assessed and classified in the present thesis. Chapter Twelve revisits this taxonomy to compare the respective think tanks' influence in the Part Three case studies.

Table 3-2: Evolved status taxonomy

		Evolved status of policy issue		
		Political attention	Political priority	Policy priority
Think tank influence	Political attention			
	Political priority			
	Policy priority			

The Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework readily volunteers a variety of questions through its four analytical dimensions. For example, on an individual policy issue, was the relevant think tank a prominent actor? Did the think tank possess a sufficiently powerful voice to at least engage and perhaps persuade policymakers? What ideas did the think tank propose? How consistent were those ideas with the evolution of policy thinking or outcomes? What was

the political context that facilitated the think tank's relevance? And, did the characteristics of the issue permit the think tank to play an influential role? The process-tracing technique allows the comprehensive examination of these questions, consistent with the predications of critical realism.

Crucially, the analytical framework encourages the assessment of rival explanations that might better explain the evolution of the policy issue. The Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework provides the necessary flexibility to evaluate the primary drivers of the policy issue and to determine the role and effectiveness of individual actors more directly. In short, the modified framework facilitates the assessment of think tank influence by combining evidence across a range of key dimensions. Influence is assessed across the entire policy process, from issue framing and agenda setting through to official policy outcomes.[26]

3.5 Methodological Approach

The critical realist philosophy encourages the adoption of a mixed methodology. In their study on construct validity, Campbell and Fiske (1959, pp. 85, 101) recognise the 'preponderant strength of methods variance' and urge 'multiple operationalism' and 'methodological triangulation' to improve measurement. Eugene Webb (1970, p. 3) similarly asserts that 'once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced.' Critical realists Patomaki and Wight (2000, pp. 225, 235) argue in favour of 'methodological and epistemological pluralism' while Zachariadis et al. (2013, p. 864) assert that critical realism 'endorses a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods' which 'convey different types of knowledge about generative mechanisms.' These scholars concede the complexity of the social world and seek to enhance inferential validity through a mixed-methods approach. The present study consequently uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine think tank influence.

The adaptability of mixed methods research allows it to serve several purposes. Greene et al.'s (1989, pp. 258-259) posit five in their foundational study on mixed methods designs:

- triangulation
- complementarity

[26] Betsill and Corell's (2008, pp. 25-40) framework also supports the analysis in each of the three case studies.

- development
- initiation
- expansion

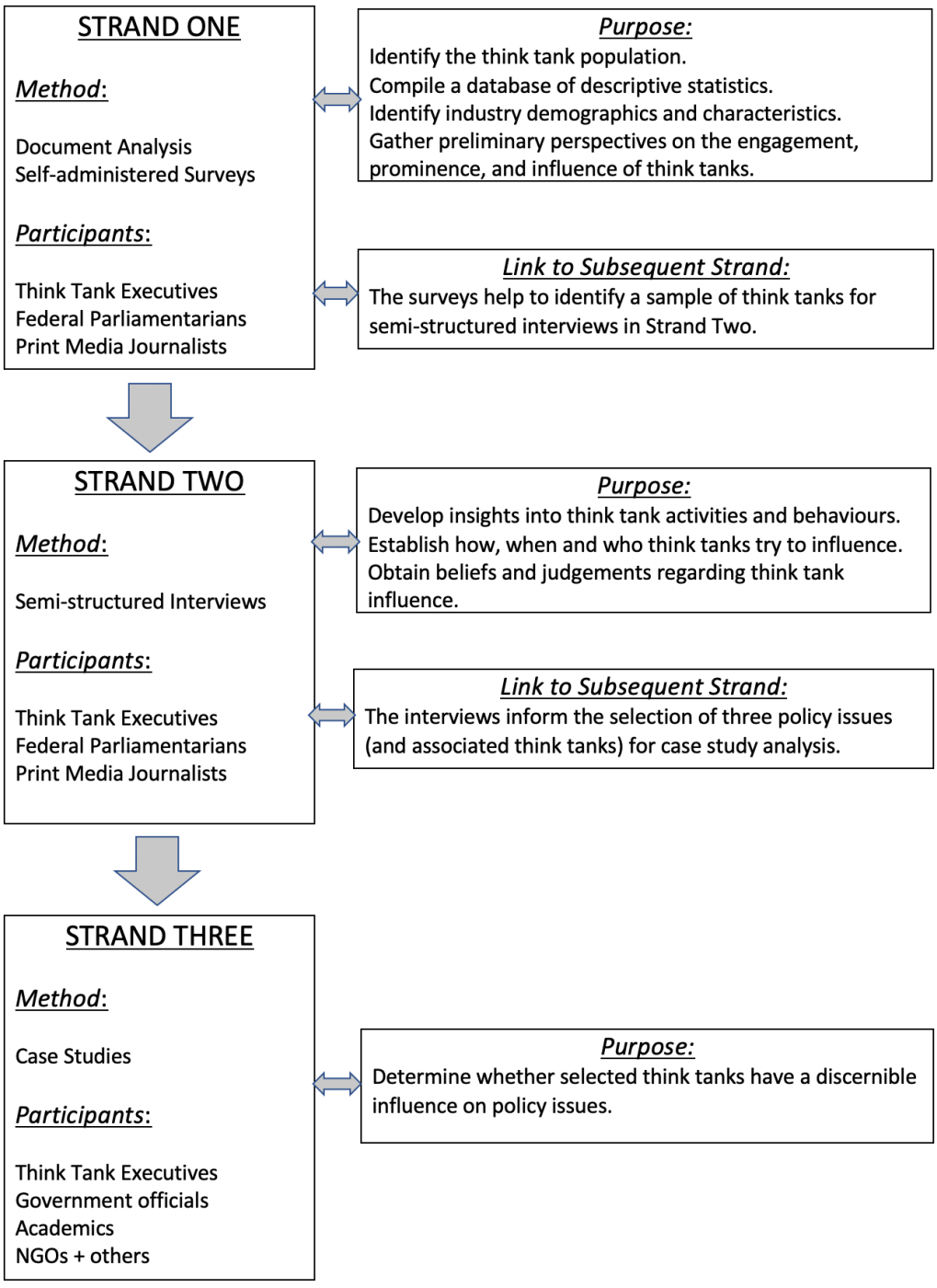
The primary purpose of the present design is development. That is, data generated through quantitative research helps to inform (or develop) subsequent qualitative research strands. More specifically, original survey data help identify a sample of think tanks for participation in semi-structured interviews. These interviews, in turn, help to identify specific policy cases associated with individual think tanks. This sequential design leverages data collected in each strand to inform the direction, focus, and analysis in subsequent strands. This study's mixed method design also seeks the benefits of triangulation, defined as 'the use of multiple methods […] in investigations of the same phenomenon in order to strengthen the validity of the inquiry results' (Greene et al., 1989, p. 256). Here, initial survey data is triangulated with subsequent interview data to augment the validity of the inferences.

Mixed methods research designs come in a myriad of configurations. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003, p. 680) assert that design typologies are 'among the most complex and controversial issues in mixed methodology.' Tashakkori and Teddlie seek to rationalise the number of parametric prescriptions in design frameworks and contend that 'multi-strand' designs – like in the present study – require the determination of only three features:

- the number of strands
- the stage of integration
- the timing of strands

This thesis adopts Tashakkori and Teddlie's (2003, p. 687) 'sequential mixed methods' model. In this model, data collected from earlier quantitative strands (surveys, in this case) shape the source and type of data collected in subsequent qualitative strands (interviews and case studies). Figure 3.1 shows that this thesis consists of three research strands. The initial quantitative strand (strand one) primarily addresses the three supplementary research questions. The study's central research question is most directly tackled in the qualitative strands (strands two and three).

Figure 3-1: Research strands



3.6 Methods

This study's empirical components (encompassing Part's Two and Three) incorporate three interdependent research strands, each of which is distinguished by its purpose and methods (as Figure 3.1 details).

3.6.1 Strand One: Document Analysis and Surveys

This initial research strand first develops an original database to provide aggregate data on think tank organisational characteristics and industry demographics. The database includes think tank structural affiliations, ideological orientations, issue foci, scale metrics, marketing methods, and financial circumstances. More broadly, strand one serves three purposes: to map the structure and characteristics of the Australian think tank industry, gather perceptions of think tank influence, and identify a sample of think tanks for interviews in strand two.

Defining the Think Tank Population

This study's foremost empirical requirement is to determine the constituents of the Australian think tank industry. A detailed process combining the inspection of historical think tank listings and web-based searches enabled the identification of ninety-three policy institutes. The ensuing discussion further details this identification process.

The *Global Go-To Think Tank Index* (*GGTTI*) collated by the Think Tanks and Civil Society Program at the University of Pennsylvania is the highest-profile and most commonly referenced global think tank database. First produced in 2007, this annual index is the benchmark source for scholars examining think tank populations. To illustrate, the *GGTTI* index is the identified source of think tank populations in six of the eleven independent chapters in the edited volume *Think Tanks, Foreign Policy and Geo-Politics* (Abelson et al., 2018, pp. 3, 38, 83, 154, 166, 188). But the present thesis rejects the *GGTTI* index as an authoritative source. The 2017, 2018 and 2019 *GGTTI* reports appear to contain material errors in the reported number of Australian think tanks (McGann, 2018, 2019, 2020).[27] In addition, only fifteen of the supposed thirty-nine think tanks in the GGTTI list are identified as valid inclusions in the present study (McGann, 2018). While the *GGTTI* reports remain a useful reference point, the data is used cautiously given what appear to be material flaws in the reporting.

[27] For example, the 2019 *GGTTI* report declares that Australia possesses forty-two think tanks, but the actual number of *unique* think tanks identified in the report is only thirty-two. There appear to be ten duplicates in the aggregate count owing to institute names being expressed inconsistently in the individual category lists. For example, the *Strategic* and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University is also referenced as the *Security* and Defence Studies Centre (and one other variant). This one entity seemingly appears in the aggregate count *three* times. Similar inconsistencies appear in the 2017 and 2018 reports, where the number of duplicates, added to the uniquely identified think tanks, exactly match the aggregate counts. Two email attempts to confirm the constituents of the aggregate Australian think tank count were unsuccessful.

Fraussen and Halpin (2017, p. 109) identify fifty-nine institutes in their study on the strategic policy capacities of Australian think tanks.[28] Their study is an appropriate benchmark, but the authors prepared their audit in 2014, and the industry has since expanded. Further, Fraussen and Halpin use Andrew Rich's think tank definition, which – as discussed in Chapter Two – is narrower than the conceptualisation adopted in the present study. This study therefore constructs a new population database to account for these timing and definitional differences.

This thesis follows Fraussen and Halpin (2017) and draws on the Factiva global news database to identify active think tanks. But the starting point for the present study's identification process diverges from Fraussen and Halpin's. The present study first collates pre-existing think tank lists to establish a candidate list of previously identified entities. The following references feed the composition of the initial candidate list:

- *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* (McGann, 2018)
- Fraussen and Halpin (2017, p. 121)
- *On-Think-Tanks Directory* (Gutbrod, 2017)
- Vromen and Hurley (2015, p. 172)
- Milliken (2015, p. 37)
- Observatoire Europeen des Think Observatoire Europeen des Think Tanks (2009)
- t Hart and Vromen (2008, p. 140)
- Nippon Institute for Research NIRA (2008)
- I. Marsh and Stone (2004, p. 251)
- I. Marsh (1994)
- Stone (1993, pp. 268-274)
- I. Marsh (1980, p. 101)

This initial process identified one-hundred-and-forty-eight candidate entities.[29] A Factiva search augmented the candidate population by identifying additional think tanks that did not

[28] Murray (2017) suggests that Australia has forty-two think tanks but does not provide an entity list. Murray also suggests right-leaning institutes dominate the landscape, a finding that is challenged in the present thesis.
[29] The inclusion of lists dating back to Ian Marsh's (1980) pioneering study allows for assessing survivor bias in the ensuing discussion and analysis.

appear in the existing lists. This Factiva search swelled the database by twenty-two entities.[30] Finally, web-based (Google) searches using the term 'Australian think tank' identified a further fourteen entities. A total of one-hundred-and-eighty-four entities make up the complete candidate list. All candidates were subsequently assessed (primarily via online content analysis) against qualifying criteria to ensure consistency with this study's think tank conceptualisation. The qualifying questions ask:

- Is the entity involved in public policy research, analysis or engagement?
- Does the entity produce or foster the production of public policy ideas?
- Is the entity engaged in the provision of expertise?
- Does the entity attempt to influence policymakers, either directly or indirectly, on public policy issues?
- Is the entity intellectually independent?
- Does the entity act on behalf of an identifiable constituency (thereby impairing its independence)?
- Does the entity self-identify as a think tank?
- Is the entity organised as a permanent entity rather than a project, or otherwise temporary, entity?
- Does the entity's website indicate that the entity remains active?

Each entity was ranked on a conformity scale – as high, medium, or low – based on the responses to these qualifying questions. However, there is no deterministic mapping between question responses and the conformity rankings due to the occasional need for subjective judgements. For example, the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) is widely recognised as a think tank (and identifies itself as such) but does not produce research. Nor does the AIIA seek to directly influence public policy decisions. A subjective assessment, however, allows for the AIIA to take its rightful place within the population.

[30] The Factiva search parameters were 'think tank' in 'Major News and Business Sources: Australian and New Zealand' for 'the last two years'. The search was conducted over three days between October 27 to October 29, 2018. The search included all Australian newspapers to ensure the identification of regionally focussed think tanks.

This study includes both government- and university-affiliated entities that function as think tanks but excludes business groups, owing to their pledged allegiances to sectional interests (which pollutes their intellectual independence). Government-affiliated entities are those agencies that form part of the Australian Public Service (APS). The characteristics of all APS agencies covered by the *Public Service Act 1999* were inspected to determine which ones function as think tanks (see Australian Public Service Commission, 2019).[31] Eight agencies conform to the criteria and are included in the final population. The identification of university-affiliated entities is more difficult. Every effort has been made to include appropriate university-based research centres *with an identifiable policy orientation* in this study. But in the absence of a definitive listing of all Australian university research centres, such an effort is likely to be imperfect. The final population includes twenty-one university-affiliated bodies.

Those entities rated 'high and 'medium' on the conformity scale were deemed to have sufficiently satisfied the criteria to warrant inclusion in the final population. This study identifies a total of ninety-three Australian think tanks (Appendix A contains the full entity listing). This population identification process supported the construction of an extensive original database containing over five thousand data points across various think tank features and characteristics. Chapter Four extensively explores these details.

Survey Design

Surveys play an important role in this study. They provide data on the structure and organisation of the Australian think tank industry and augment the descriptive data collected in the earlier population identification process. The surveys also provide subjective content enabling triangulation with interview data collected in the later research strands.

All ninety-three think tanks were survey targets. Most entities were willing participants, although six declined participation or were unwilling to provide individual email details to facilitate the distribution of the questionnaire.[32] Thus, eighty-seven self-administered online questionnaires were dispatched. Only one questionnaire was distributed per institute, and the

[31] An inspection of all APS agency websites was conducted in November 2018.

[32] Institute websites were the primary source for email contact details. Where it was not possible to directly ascertain the contact details of target participants, an email was sent to the general entity address to request specific contact details.

Executive Director (or equivalent) was the target survey unit. Seventy-one think tanks responded (82 per cent), and Executive Directors (or equivalent) were the confirmed respondents on 79 per cent of the questionnaires.

This study also gathered perspectives on think tank behaviours and effectiveness from federal parliamentarians and print media journalists. These experts are the primary targets and recipients of think tank products, and their collective judgements play a vital role in this study. Schedler (2012, p. 21) points to 'the essential role that judgment plays […] in the measurement of complex concepts.' In this regard, expert judgements facilitate a greater understanding of think tank influence.

All members of the Australian federal parliament were survey targets (one-hundred-and-fifty-one in the House of Representatives and seventy-six in the Senate). The Parliament of Australia website provides email contact details for most parliamentarians, while others were obtained by phoning the office of the parliamentarian (see Parliament of Australia, 2019).[33] A total of two-hundred-and-forty-four online questionnaires were dispatched to federal parliamentarians.[34] The response rate was consistent across the Senate and House and measured 21 per cent in total (fifty individual responses).

Surveys were also dispatched to print-media journalists who had previously referenced think tank content in their reporting (as identified in the prior Factiva search). The final sample frame included one-hundred-and-sixty-three journalists, although a total of two-hundred-and-ten individuals were initially identified. Journalists who were no longer active, lacked identifiable contact details, or lacked relevance, were excluded from the sample frame. This purposive sample ensured each journalist was familiar with think tanks (the subject matter) and their activities (consistent with Schedler, 2012). The journalist survey generated sixty-five responses (a response rate of 40 per cent).

[33] Email details were available for all but thirty parliamentarians. This author made phone calls to the offices of these thirty parliamentarians to obtain email addresses, which was successful in all cases. Contact details for think tanks, parliamentarians and print-media journalists were gathered in May and June 2019.

[34] The two-hundred-and-forty-four targeted recipients include the combined two-hundred-and-twenty-seven House Members and Senators, plus eighteen outgoing Senators whose email contact details remained on the Parliament of Australia website (there was a federal election on May 18, 2019). It is unclear whether the questionnaires successfully reached the outgoing Senators. No questionnaires were sent to outgoing House Members due to the absence of contact details. The distribution also excluded the Prime Minister. The census of parliamentarians was taken on June 5, 2019.

In summary, the survey includes three categories of experts: think tanks, federal parliamentarians, and print media journalists. The questionnaires distributed to each of the three groups were not identical but do overlap in most areas.[35] The surveys provide:

- objective data on think tanks (basic demographic data);
- diverse judgements and perspectives on the activities and influence of think tanks;
- a means to narrow the focus of the study by distinguishing a sample of think tanks for face-to-face interviews in the second research strand.

The questionnaires were cross-sectional, self-administered, and almost entirely composed of closed-ended questions. Scholars have previously found that open-ended questions on self-administered surveys result in higher abandonment rates versus those composed solely of closed-ended questions (see, for example, S. Crawford et al., 2001, pp. 158-160). As such, closed-ended questions were prioritised in the present survey, aside from one open-ended question that encouraged parliamentarians and journalists to identify up to three influential think tanks (thereby narrowing the research focus). The surveys combine categorical and ordinal questions, where the ordinal items use a Likert rating scale (see Bryman, 2016, p. 154). The surveys were concurrently distributed to all individuals within each respondent group (think tanks, parliamentarians, and journalists) and were designed and delivered using the *Qualtrics* software package.[36] Table 3.3 provides summary statistics for the three survey groups (Appendix C provides more detailed response data).

[35] Appendix B contains the three questionnaires.

[36] The think tank survey commenced on June 4, 2019, and closed on July 3, 2019 (thirty days). The journalist survey commenced on June 6, 2019, and concluded on July 5, 2019 (thirty days). The parliamentarian survey commenced on June 17, 2019, and closed on July 31, 2019 (45 days). The parliamentarian survey warranted a longer response window because it was conducted shortly after the 2019 federal election.

Table 3-3: Survey response data

	Number of survey solicitations	Completed surveys
Think Tanks	87	71 (82%)
Print Media Journalists	163	65 (40%)
Federal Parliamentarians	244	50 (21%)
Totals	494	186 (38%)

The think tank and parliamentarian surveys minimise the likelihood of sampling error because they are census surveys (Daniel, 2012, p. 25). Coverage and sampling errors are likely to be isolated to the journalist survey as some journalists who correspond on think tanks might not have been identified. Nevertheless, the identification process is sufficiently thorough to minimise these concerns.

3.6.2 Strand Two: Semi-Structured Interviews

The first research strand provides broad insights into the Australian think tank industry by capturing objective data as well as the perceptions and beliefs of diverse actors. The strand one surveys also facilitate the identification of purportedly influential think tanks, thereby helping to concentrate the focus in this second research strand (which spans Part Two of the thesis). Here, the third supplementary research question – *How and who do think tanks attempt to influence?* – is the primary focus. This strand also seeks insights into think tanks' everyday activities and, importantly, the identification of specific policy issues (cases) on which think tanks claim to have exerted influence.

This second research strand incorporates data from a total of seventy-six semi-structured interviews. The average interview length was thirty-six minutes, equating to forty-five hours of content.[37] Interview participants primarily include think tanks, federal parliamentarians and print media journalists. Table 3.4 provides summary statistics from the interview process.[38]

[37] The average interview length was forty-four minutes for think tanks, twenty-eight minutes for journalists, and nineteen minutes for parliamentarians.

[38] Table 3.4 details seventy-four interviews. Two additional interviews were conducted with experts from other third-party entities. Appendix D lists all interviewees.

Table 3-4: Strand Two interview summary data

	Individual interviewee solicitations	Completed interviews	In-person interviews	Remote interviews	Interviewee permits identification	Interviewee requests anonymity
Think Tanks	52	47 (90%)	29	18	44	3
Print Media Journalists	28	10 (36%)	0	10	9	1
Federal Parliamentarians	60	17 (28%)	0	17	1	16
Totals	140	74 (53%)	29 (39%)	45 (61%)	54 (73%)	20 (27%)

In strand one, parliamentarians and journalists identified twenty-one unique think tanks via the sole open-ended survey question. Twenty of these twenty-one institutes agreed to participate in the second strand interviews (only *The Australia Institute* eschewed participation). The final interview solicitation list included an additional twenty-four think tanks to ensure the data was representative of the entire think tank population (particularly with respect to think tank size, affiliation, geography, and focus).[39] Forty-one of the forty-seven think tank interviewees were at the Executive Director level, while two were Research Directors, and three were senior scholars (one was a senior marketer).

It is important to note the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the timing and method of interviews. Thirty-nine of the forty-seven think tank interviews occurred before the onset of the pandemic (in January 2020) and were mostly conducted in-person. But only one of the combined twenty-seven journalist and politician interviews was pre-pandemic. As a result, all of these interviews were remote.[40] It is difficult to discern the exact impact of the pandemic on the interview acceptance rate, but parliamentarian acceptances did noticeably fade as the pandemic intensified (in 2021). Appendix D provides further detail on the strand two interview participants.

All semi-structured interviews used an interview guide to ensure the same themes and topics were explored across respondents. Appendix E provides an indicative interview guide for each of the three groups (think tanks, parliamentarians, and journalists). Seventy-two of the seventy-four interviews were recorded and manually transcribed (verbatim) by this author. The data analysis package *NVivo* was then used for data reduction and coding.[41] The strand two interview data were triangulated with strand one survey data to facilitate a complete analysis of the Australian think tank industry. The analysis performed at this stage –

[39] Interviews were conducted with two separate individuals from seven entities.
[40] In total, nineteen of the remote interviews were conducted by phone, and twenty-six were conducted via the *Zoom* video-conferencing platform.
[41] *NVivo* was used to reduce and code both strand two and strand three data.

primarily Part Two of the thesis – thoroughly responds to the three supplementary questions. This analysis also provides crucial insights into the central research question before addressing it more directly in strand three (Part Three).

3.6.3 Strand Three: Case Study Analysis

Case Study Structure

This third research strand encompasses three case studies that directly examine the influence of think tanks on policymaking. The independent cases are presented in three stand-alone chapters (Chapters Nine, Ten, and Eleven) and are prosecuted using the modified Shiffman and Smith (2007) analytical framework and the process-tracing method. Case data is primarily sourced through semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and archival research. Documents come from think tank archives, government websites, NGO websites, library databases, media articles, and academic journal articles. The individual case chapters provide additional detail regarding data sources and search criteria.

In aggregate, thirty-two semi-structured interviews were completed across these three case studies, bringing the total interview count for this thesis to one-hundred-and-eight (sixty-eight hours of content). The methods section in each case chapter also provides additional detail on the interviews for that case. The interview processes were emergent in nature, employing the snowball technique until the point of saturation (Patton, 2015, pp. 266-271). Interviews with the principal actors on each policy issue ensured saturation was comfortably attained. Appendix D contains a full list of case study interviewees, broadly encompassing:

- think tank scholars,
- interest groups and civil society actors associated with the issue,
- parliamentarians and bureaucrats, and
- university scholars possessing expertise on the case topic.

All strand three interviews were conducted remotely (due to the coronavirus pandemic) using the *Zoom* video-conferencing platform. These interviews were recorded and fully transcribed

(verbatim) by the author.[42] Only two interviewees across the three cases wished to remain anonymous, although the author has additionally anonymised some sensitive comments.

The case study method is compatible with this inquiry's critical realist philosophy and mixed methodological design (Hu, 2018, p. 124). The multi-case approach also allows for the investigation of generative mechanisms in different contexts (Bhaskar, 1978). But there is no attempt to generalise the case study findings to the think tank population. The cases specifically serve to explain the influence of individual think tanks on the identified issues and the circumstances under which they are influential (Yin, 2014, pp. 18-21). In short, the cases show whether think tanks can be influential and the types of influence they exert.

The cases are examined sequentially and presented in stand-alone chapters before Chapter Twelve presents a cross-case synthesis. Yin suggests that the 'explanation building' technique is well suited to the multi-case design (2014, pp. 147-150). This technique is equivalent to process-tracing, which, in turn, corresponds to the retroductive process advocated by critical realists (see Bhaskar, 1978, pp. 125, 135-136; C. Oliver, 2012, p. 380; Zachariadis et al., 2013, p. 866). Thus, there is consistency across the study's research philosophy, methodological approach and analytical framework.

Case Study Candidates

As this study examines the influence of think tanks on public policy, it is desirable to identify and select 'positive' cases for the case studies (that is, cases on which think tanks *claim* to have exerted influence). The analysis of positive cases permits insights into how, why, and under what circumstances think tanks can influence policy.

Like other groups seeking to persuade government policy, cases on which think tanks 'failed' to exert policy influence likely predominate (see Baumgartner et al., 2009, pp. 110-111, who assert that lobbyists only occasionally influence policy). Consistent with this submission, the strand two interviews asked think tanks to nominate 'positive' cases. A think tank's *engagement* on a policy issue is insufficient to conclude that the think tank itself believes it *influenced* the evolution of the policy issue. The entity may believe that its best efforts amounted to nothing. As such, selecting a case where a think tank itself does *not* believe it exerted influence will yield little value in the present context. But influence claims

[42] Four interviews were unable to be fully transcribed due to technical issues with the *Zoom* platform.

can be critically evaluated by asking think tanks for exemplary cases where they believe they definitively influenced policy.

The case selection process adopted here is similar to Baumgartner et al. (2009, pp. 5-6), whereby those authors directly asked 'lobbyists' to nominate cases on which they were active.[43] In other think tank-focussed studies, Lindquist (1989, p. 105) selected cases based on the policy field, Rich (2004, p. 109) was guided by Wilson's (1980) policymaking typology, and Abelson (2006) selected cases based on the prominence and intractability of specific foreign policy issues. These divergent approaches help inform the next stage of the case screening and selection process, whereby the final case selections are partially determined by the nature of the policy issue itself.

Case Study Selection

The strand two interviews asked think tank executives to identify policy issues on which they purportedly exerted influence.[44] Their responses enabled the construction of a long-list of forty-one candidate cases, as Appendix F details (the appendix also details specific think tank claims). Screening procedures were then used to sort this long-list to facilitate the selection of three exemplar cases. To be clear, this screening process focuses on the desirability of the cases themselves rather than any predisposition toward certain think tanks.

Yin (2014, p. 95) recommends a two-stage screening process when there are a large number of candidate cases. The present study first uses the following screening criteria to sort the full case list into three candidature categories (high, medium, and low):

- The significance of the case. The case should have some degree of importance from a public policy perspective.
- The representativeness of the case. Bryman (2016, p. 62) prefers cases with a 'usual' context rather than selecting unique or extreme cases where the case's circumstances might impact its representativeness.

[43] It is relevant to note that Baumgartner et al. (2009, p. 9) include a broad range of organisational types in their conceptualisation of 'lobbyists'. This broad grouping includes think tanks.

[44] Many think tanks interviewees were also asked to identify and discuss cases on which they had limited or no impact, despite their best efforts. This content is earmarked for future research.

- The ability to define boundaries around the case. Patton (2015, pp. 259-260) submits that these boundaries might be arbitrary but are necessary to focus the inquiry.
- The recency of the case. The accessibility of the relevant actors is likely to be improved with contemporary cases.
- How the relevant think tank purportedly influenced the case. The claim of influence needs to be credible and well-founded.
- The willingness of the relevant think tank to participate in the case. It is more challenging to investigate cases without the cooperation of the reference entity.

The classifications of the candidate cases are not deterministic, meaning that the screening criteria do not directly map into a particular ranking (high, medium, or low). The rankings are based on conformity with the screening criteria but also incorporate an unavoidable dose of subjectivity. This first screening stage identified seventeen 'high' ranked cases. These cases were then assessed in greater detail in the second screening stage, with the selection of three exemplar cases based on this more comprehensive evaluation. The Preface to Part Three of this thesis – as a precursor to the case study analyses – provides greater detail on the outcome of this second screening stage.

Part Two

Chapter Four: The State of the Industry

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the structure of the Australian think tank industry and identifies the characteristics and resources of its constituents. This detailed examination directly addresses the first of this study's two supplementary research questions. It provides insights into the industry's foci and disposition and, importantly, investigates the capacity of think tanks to influence. This organisational analysis is an essential precursor to the subsequent examination of think tanks' purported policy influence (Truman, 1967, p. 13; Stone, 1996, p. 117).

The chapter illuminates the tremendous diversity within Australia's think tank industry. It identifies variations in size, resource base, ideological orientation, structural independence, and issue foci, all of which determine why, when, and how these unique entities might impact policy deliberations. Section 4.2 first examines the features of the industry, how it is organised, and its constituent characteristics. Section 4.3 then investigates policy institutes' financial circumstances – an issue critically important to the exertion of influence.

Once described as being 'on the margins not only of bureaucracy but also of the political parties', this chapter demonstrates that the Australian think tank industry is now well-positioned to play a consequential role in policy debates (I. Marsh and Stone, 2004, p. 262).

4.2 Structural and Operational Diversity

This section examines the organisational features of the ninety-three think tanks identified in this study. It distinguishes policy institutes operating across the ideological spectrum and evidences their varying degrees of structural independence. The section shows that think tanks are geographically concentrated but have a broad policy focus. In Australia, there is no 'typical' think tank.

4.2.1 Size and Focus

Institute size is a relatively arbitrary concept, but such a determination is useful when examining and comparing the identified population across characteristics. More generally, size is an important variable for the think tank industry – no matter how it is measured. A

policy institute's resource base substantially determines its breadth of focus and the methods it uses to promote its preferences (consistent with Halpin and Binderkrantz, 2011, p. 214).

The production and promotion of ideas is an expensive pursuit, so it is natural to suppose that think tanks with more generous resource endowments – and more avenues to influence – will have greater success in achieving their objectives. However, in the US, Baumgartner et al. (2009, p. 23) find 'surprisingly weak links between material resources and moving public policy in one's preferred direction.' The present study does not attempt to establish direct links between entity size and influence, yet the size variable remains analytically useful. It demonstrates what it takes to develop status and prominence (although not necessarily effectiveness) within the industry.

The former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, Wayne Swan, believes that the profile and penetration of left-leaning think tanks suffer because of their lack of size, asserting 'the problem with all of our [centre-left] think tanks is that they're very boutique in terms of size and resources, which is a shame. What I would like to see is them all grow' (interview, 2019).[45] Swan directly associates think tank resources with policy influence. He laments the resource deficiencies of many left-leaning institutes and believes that material resources are crucial determinants of think tank success (on resource types, see Binderkrantz et al., 2015).

Some Australian think tanks have cultivated prominent public profiles, but many more operate out of the public gaze, largely due to resource constraints. For instance, when reflecting upon his entity's limited resource base, the Executive Director of the Australian Institute for Progress, Graham Young, asserts that 'it is not realistic to think that an organisation of our size is going to be able to go out there and talk to the public […] you've got to have huge advertising budgets and things like that' (interview, 2019). But there is no suggestion here that size affects an institute's ability to generate impactful ideas. These intangible resources are the primary currency of think tanks, and their production does not necessarily require an abundance of material resources (human, financial, and operational). Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly more challenging for modestly endowed entities to permeate the consciousness of a targeted audience in a highly competitive marketplace for ideas.

[45] Wayne Swan was Deputy Prime Minister from June 2010 until June 2013 and the Australian Treasurer from December 2007 until June 2013. Swan was the National President of the Australian Labor Party at the time of interview (Parliament of Australia, 2021).

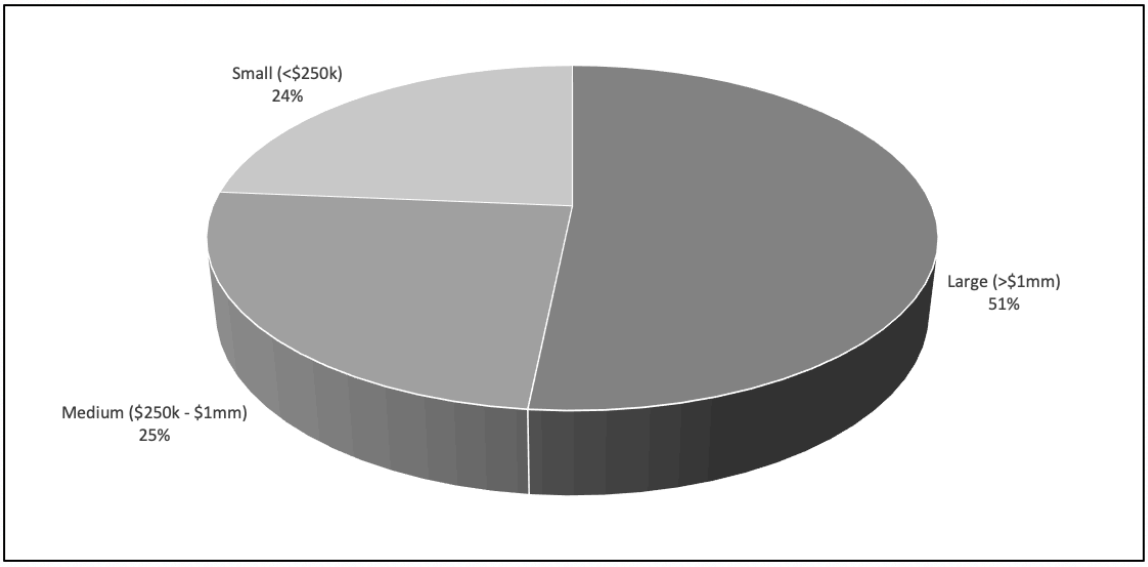
Entity size classifications typically rely upon an assessment of material resources. Rich (1999) uses financial measures to assess entity size in his examination of the US think tank industry. In contrast, Fraussen and Halpin (2016, p. 481) focus on employee headcount in their examination of Australian interest groups. The present study follows the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) and catalogues entity size using revenue data. The ACNC classifies small entities as those with annual revenues under two-hundred-and-fifty thousand dollars; medium-sized organisations as those with annual revenues between two-hundred-and-fifty thousand dollars and one million dollars; and large entities as those with annual revenues exceeding one million dollars (ACNC, 2012, p. 156). The ACNC classification is appropriate because it places policy institutes in the right structural context: 97 per cent of Australian think tanks are not-for-profit (NFP) entities. This study does not assert that entities with annual revenues exceeding one million dollars are intrinsically large (the Australian Tax Office alternatively classifies large entities as those with annual revenues exceeding two-hundred-and-fifty *million* dollars).[46] Instead, size classifications here reflect intra-industry relativities. Contextually, think tank size is assessed relative to other think tanks in the Australian population.

The annual revenue numbers of NFP think tanks are readily available through the ACNC website.[47] The small number of non-NFP institutes mostly provide financial data through alternate publicly available reports. Figure 4.1 presents the collation of this data and shows that more than half of Australia's think tank population enjoy annual revenues exceeding one million dollars (that is, they are 'large' entities within the NFP world).

[46] The Australian Tax Office (ATO) categorises entities with an annual income of less than two million dollars as 'small'. Those with annual incomes exceeding two-hundred-and-fifty million dollars are 'large', and those in between are 'medium' (see Gilfillan, 2015).

[47] The ACNC requires all registered charities to produce an Annual Information Statement containing financial data (ACNC, 2021).

Figure 4-1: Think tank size (by annual revenue, n=93)

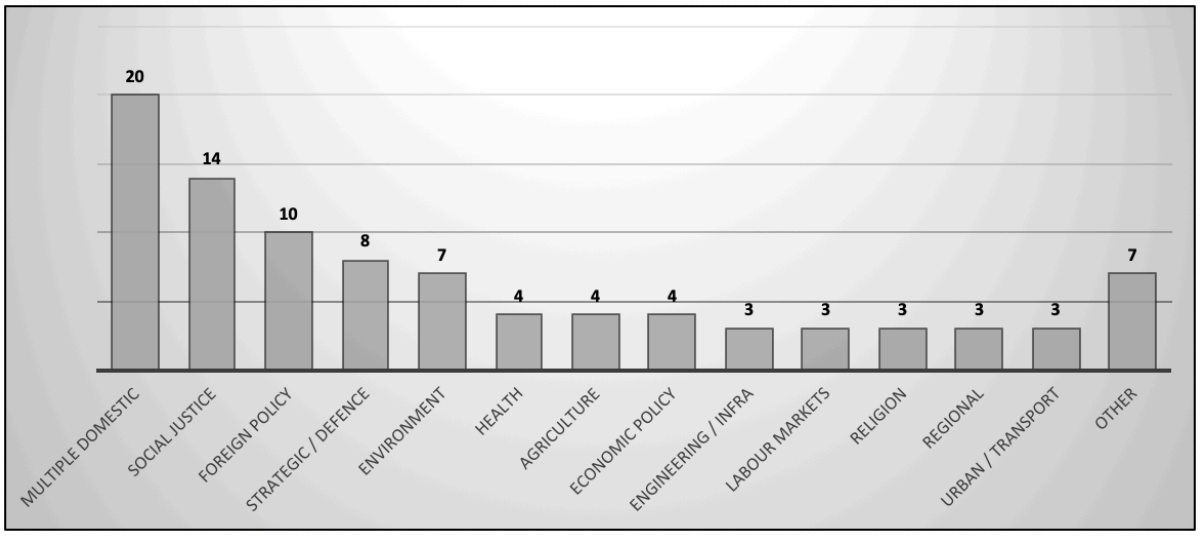


Twenty-two of the forty-eight 'large' institutes in the think tank population are structurally independent (that is, they have no formal association or connection to another entity).[48] The remaining twenty-six 'large' entities have university, government, or political party affiliations, thus providing access to the bulkier resource bases of these companion organisations. Government- and university-affiliated institutes are able to call upon a vast assemblage of administrative assets to support their activities. On the other hand, structurally independent entities must rely on their independent fundraising activities and, in most cases, a more modest pool of administrative resources. Appendix G details the institutes in each size category.

Think tank size is a good indicator of policy focus (consistent with Halpin and Binderkrantz, 2011). While most entities in this study concentrate on a specific policy field, 22 per cent possess a genuine multi-issue focus, and 70 per cent of these multi-issue institutes are 'large'. Figure 4.2 illustrates think tanks' varied policy foci. The chart seemingly suggests modest levels of participation in some issue areas, but the individual category numbers do not account for multi-issue think tank participation. Nevertheless, Hagland (2021) asserts that foreign policy-focused think tanks are under-represented in Australia, noting that only one institute (the Lowy Institute) has a focus beyond Australia's immediate Asian neighbourhood (see also Commonwealth of Australia, 2021).

[48] Thirty-eight of the forty-five 'small' and 'medium' sized entities are also structurally independent (seven possess structural affiliations).

Figure 4-2: Think tank policy focus (by number of institutes)



4.2.2 Independence

Think tank independence can be conceived of in different ways. Some scholars assert that structural independence is a defining think tank characteristic and, as such, explicitly exclude entities with structural (or legal) affiliations (see, for example, Rich, 1999). The present study instead privileges intellectual independence, contending that structural affiliations need not impact a think tank's focus, objectivity, or policy ideas. Figure 4.3 details the organisational affiliations – if any – of the ninety-three institutes in the present study.

Figure 4-3: Think tank structural affiliations (by number of institutes)

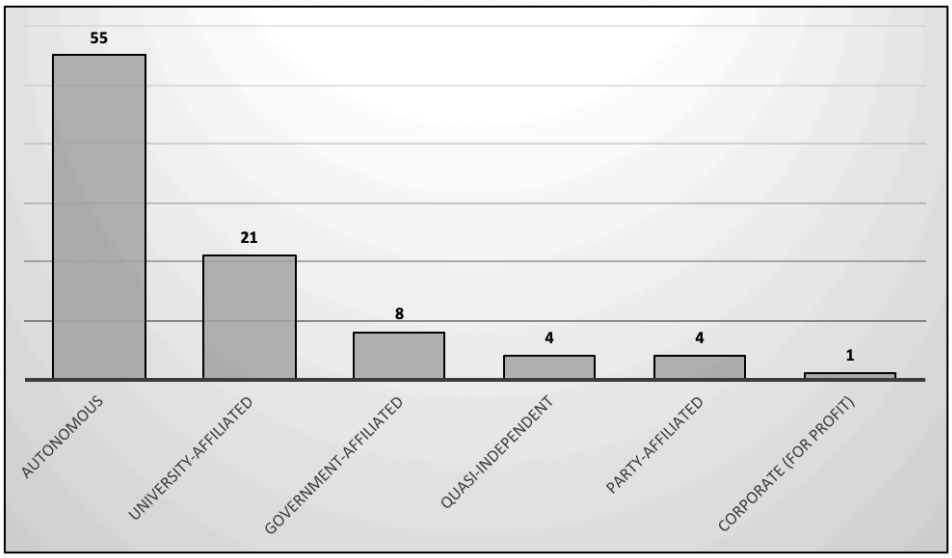


Figure 4.3 shows that autonomous (unaffiliated) entities dominate the Australian think tank landscape, numbering sixty in total (65 per cent).[49] But this does not imply that the remaining thirty-three institutes lack intellectual independence. To illustrate, twelve of the remaining thirty-three structurally affiliated institutes participated in this study's strand two interviews, and they uniformly assert that they vigorously protect their intellectual independence in all its forms (research findings, policy recommendations, and issue commentary).[50,51] One senior representative from a government-affiliated entity (as part of the Australian Public Service) emphasises the point: 'We value our independence probably more highly than anything else and indeed […] if we were to lose that independence or our independence was questioned, we wouldn't get the work that we do. We use it as a selling point' (Anonymous Interviewee A, 2019). Similarly, the Executive Manager at the government-affiliated Productivity Commission, Ralph Lattimore, points out that the Commission's independence is, in large part, institutionalised via the *Productivity Commission Act 1998* (interview, 2019). Lattimore references the requirement for commissioners to have diverse backgrounds (as enshrined in the *Act*) to help ensure 'you don't get that group think that you can have if everyone comes from the same perspective. So that's another way we achieve independence – independence of thought' (interview, 2019).

University-affiliated institutes such as the United States Studies Centre (USSC), Perth USAsia Centre, Mitchell Institute, and Whitlam Institute (amongst others) are all very deliberate in their language to describe their organisational connections. They use the preposition '*at*' or '*within*' (the university) rather than '*of*' (the university) to subtly characterise their arm's-length university relationships and to purposely indicate their independence. This deliberate language seeks to highlight the difference between these institutes' policy-oriented objectives and the academically-focussed publishing objectives of traditional university scholars. Even so, the Chief Executive Officer of the USSC, Simon Jackman, asserts that his institute's university affiliation 'adds to our credibility both in Canberra and Macquarie Street' (interview, 2019). Jackman's claim is consistent with

[49] The sixty consist of fifty-five autonomous institutes, four quasi-independent institutes, and one corporate entity.

[50] Seven of these twelve affiliated institutes are university-affiliated, two are government-affiliated, and three are party-affiliated.

[51] Nevertheless, the government primarily sets the research agendas of Australian Public Service entities (government-affiliated entities). Self-initiated research is typically a much smaller component of their overall research programs.

Medvetz's (2014, pp. 44-45) assertion that think tanks simultaneously seek to associate and distance themselves with different fields of power to opportunistically elevate their entity stature.

Emphasising their operational independence, each of these four university-affiliated institutes has considerable authority over the appointment of research fellows and, in all cases, total autonomy regarding their research programs (interviews with Flake, 2019; Jackman, 2019; Jackson, 2019; L. Smith, 2019).[52] Further, most university-affiliated research fellows do not have teaching commitments at their affiliated universities.[53] Thus, the evidence substantially supports their professed operational and intellectual independence.

The present study includes four institutes with political party affiliations – the Menzies Research Centre, Chifley Research Centre, Page Research Centre and The Green Institute. All four receive grant-in-aid monies from the federal government, and all four also emphasise their intellectual freedom. Nick Cater, the Executive Director of the official Liberal Party think tank, the Menzies Research Centre, addresses this issue bluntly, stating:

> We had a need to be able to operate independently because we'd be no practical use to them if we were just there to mirror their own thinking or mirror the current Party agenda. So, we do see ourselves, in a constructive way, broadening the policy debate, encouraging the Party to take certain approaches. […] We do consult, but we don't take our orders from them. So, we decide what our own policy agenda is (interview, 2019).

It might seem that Brett Gale, Executive Director of the official Australian Labor Party think tank, the Chifley Research Centre, presents a contrary view, in stating 'we don't claim to be independent or centrist – we are very much the Labor Party's think tank aligned with the Labor Party' (interview, 2019a).[54] But here, Gale reflects upon Chifley's structural relationship and ideological orientation. On the critical issue of intellectual independence, Gale instead states that Chifley 'undertakes public policy research that can help influence future Labor governments and the agenda of the Labor Party […]. It's trying to get MPs involved in thinking, and engaged in thinking, and debating ideas' (interview, 2019a). Gale sees Chifley as an intellectual contributor to the Labor Party rather than its servant.

[52] These features may not apply to all entities within the university-affiliated category.
[53] The USSC does second some traditional academics from the University of Sydney. Nevertheless, on the USSC's public policy side, research fellows have no permanent teaching commitments (interview with Jackman, 2019).
[54] Brett Gale left the Chifley Research Centre in December 2020.

Chifley and Menzies proffer independent policy thinking to influence the policy direction of their affiliated parties (the Page Research Centre for The Nationals, and The Green Institute for the Australian Greens, do the same). In this regard, Brett Gale and Nick Cater readily distinguish the impact of their institute's policy work. Cater identifies the Abbott government's adoption of the New Colombo Plan in 2014 as evidence of Menzies influence, stating 'that was entirely an initiative of the Menzies Research Centre […] and that was, I think, one of the best pieces of policy-ready research that the MRC ever did' (interview, 2019). Similarly, Gale proposes that Chifley 'did a policy paper on new environmental laws and that work was taken up and adopted basically into the Labor Party platform […]. That was deliberately designed to provide a framework for discussion at the opening of our [2018] national conference' (interview, 2019a). These party-affiliated think tanks seek to generate meaningful policy ideas to supplement the policy work performed within the party itself.

It is worthwhile reflecting upon the presumed intellectual independence of structurally autonomous think tanks. Just as it should not be assumed that structural affiliations might contaminate the intellectual outputs of affiliated entities, it likewise should not be assumed that structural independence guarantees cognitive independence. Neil James, Executive Director of the Australia Defence Association, goes further, arguing that 'you're really struggling to find a public policy institute in Australia that is genuinely independent of some sort of sectional or ideological taint' (interview, 2019). James questions the intellectual independence of think tanks performing contract work, suggesting that sponsorship creates obstacles to objectivity.[55]

One autonomous institute evidences the pressures occasionally associated with contract work but, at the same time, demonstrates how the institute's integrity was protected above all other considerations. In this case, the institute's research findings were challenged because of their unpleasant assertions. The interviewee comments anonymously:

> We were asked to redact a few things because it wouldn't be popular, and we refused to redact it because we said that they were important facts that we said informed the discussion as part of the project. There was a little back and forth, and, in the end, we said we're not happy about changing the way this is presented just to make it look better for your outcomes. What we were trying to do is present some factual information on this particular issue, and in the end, we parted ways. It's not our job to produce a particular narrative that suited the funder's agenda (Anonymous Interviewee B, 2019).

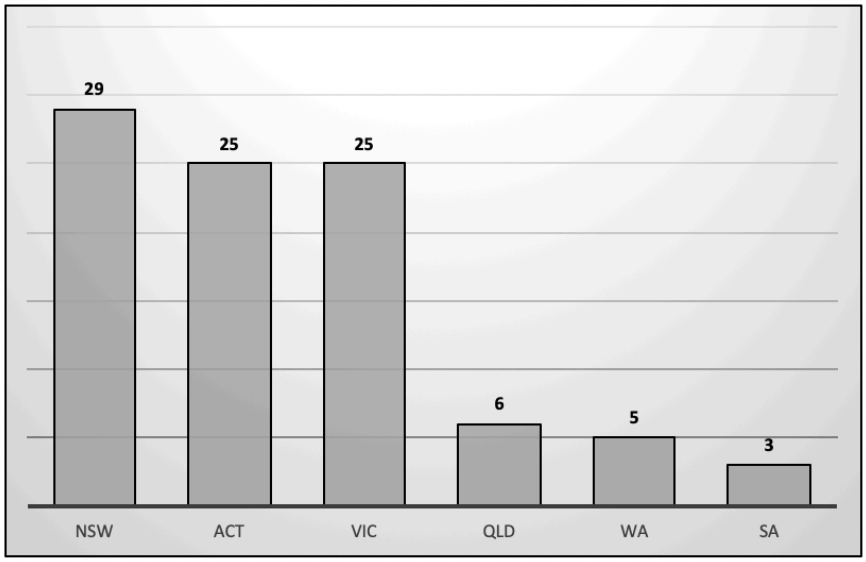
[55] This study uncovered relatively few think tanks that actually perform contract work, aside, of course, from government-affiliated entities.

Popular accounts sometimes suggest that think tanks are beholden to, or operate under the direction of, powerful third-party benefactors. This thesis finds very little evidence to support such claims.[56] Structural affiliations do not appear to have any bearing on intellectual freedom, and as this thesis later demonstrates, structurally independent think tanks typically keep private sponsors at arms-length. In this regard, it is critical to note the difference between ideological congruence and intellectual obligation. It is perfectly rational and wholly predictable that private sponsors would contribute to think tanks possessing compatible ideologies. But this should not imply that private sponsorship dilutes policy institutes' agency. Section 4.3 further discusses this important theme.

4.2.3 Geographical Distribution

Eighty-five per cent of Australia's think tanks are split between the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the country's two most populous cities (Sydney and Melbourne). At 27 per cent, the percentage located in the ACT (close to federal parliamentarians) is lower than anticipated, but the distribution is otherwise unremarkable. Figure 4.4 plots the industry's geographical distribution.

Figure 4-4: Think tank home state (by number per state)



[56] At the same time, establishing such links is not a central component of this study.

There are no discernible patterns or relationships found in this location data. For example, think tank location has no bearing on issue focus. However, the data bring attention to the relatively limited number of institutes that primarily focus on state-based issues – just seven in total.[57] The Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) and the Australian Fabians also operate decentralised branch structures across the states and territories, but they nevertheless (mostly) concentrate on national affairs.

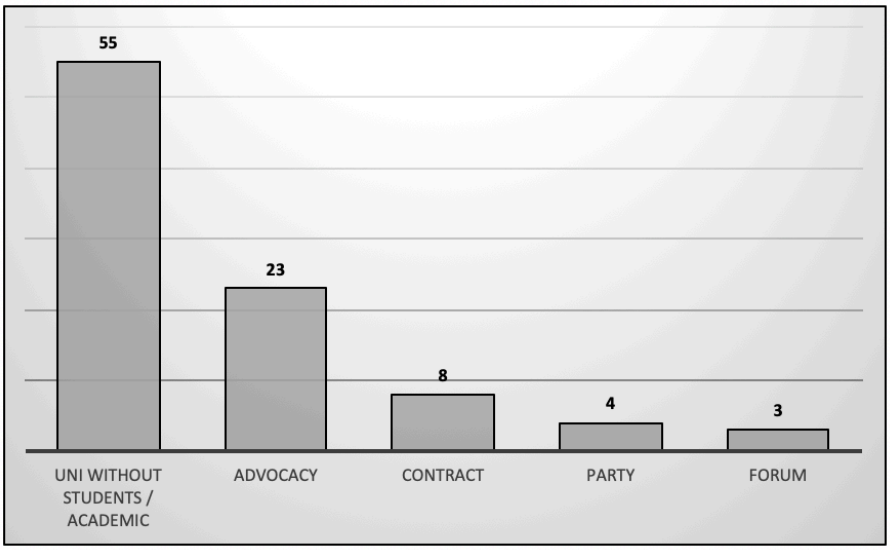
It is not surprising that Australian think tanks predominantly focus on the national policy agenda. Summers and Lowe (2014, pp. 87-105) contend that the Australian federal government has persistently increased its authority 'at the expense of the States' since federation (in 1901). This power transfer purportedly accelerated under Prime Minister John Howard, where the Liberal Party renounced its traditional support for a federalist structure in favour of a more centralised approach (Summers and Lowe, 2014, pp. 87-105). The concentration of power at the federal level therefore naturally attracts think tank attention. Importantly, think tanks also have access to a larger pool of potential donors when maintaining a federal focus.

4.2.4 Typologies

The typological framework adopted for this study (introduced in Chapter Two) helps distinguish policy institutes according to their activities, methods and outputs. According to McGann (2016, pp. 14-16), a university-without-students privileges systematic research and makes policy recommendations based on the research findings. An advocacy tank has an identifiable ideological preference that drives its research program. Advocacy tanks actively court media attention and commonly produce shorter, digestible briefs rather than thick research reports. Contract research organisations perform dedicated analytical work for a particular financial sponsor (such as the government). Party think tanks have formal affiliations to particular political parties, and forum think tanks (an addition to McGann's original framework) provide a platform for discussion and debate. Figure 4.5 frames the Australian think tank population according to this typology.

[57] The seven state-focussed entities are the Committee for Sydney, Committee for Melbourne, Committee for Perth, Committee for Adelaide, the TJ Ryan Foundation (Queensland), the Australian Institute for Progress (Queensland) and the Mannkal Economic Education Foundation (Western Australia).

Figure 4-5: Think tank typologies (by number of institutes)



There are several noteworthy points here. First, as one might expect, academic-style institutes dominate the landscape. These prototypical entities preceded the rise of advocacy tanks and, in a sense, represent the purest form of think-tanking (see, for example, Critchlow, 1985; J. Smith, 1991; Ricci, 1993). Second, advocacy tanks are increasingly prevalent, with 61 per cent established since the year 2000 (outstripping the establishment of academic-style institutes). Third, all eight contract institutes are government-affiliated entities (part of the Australian Public Service). The government determines their research agendas, and they perform research *for* the government.

The classification process for most think tanks is relatively straightforward. For example, the technocratic Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) is a quintessential university-without-students. But some institutes straddle the university-without-students and advocacy tank categories. For example, Beyond Zero Emissions (BZE) is classified here as a university-without-students based on the style of its research. BZE's typical output is empirically informed, heavily technocratic, and emphasises the scientific justification for its policy proposals.[58] Although BZE's ideological neutrality is contestable, the institute does not produce topical opinion pieces and does not actively covet media attention, thus justifying its 'academic' classification.

[58] As exemplars, BZE's '*The 10-Gigawatt Vision*' report is sixty pages, the '*Collie at the Crossroads*' report totals sixty-four pages, and '*Rethinking Cement*' runs to ninety-six pages.

On the other hand, the left-leaning The Australia Institute (TAI) is categorised as an advocacy tank. The Australia Institute is a prolific content producer (mostly in a brief format) and has a multi-issue focus. Its outputs are inspired and persuaded by its progressive philosophy and, perhaps more than any other institute, energetically pursues media coverage. The Australia Institute's internet homepage and its annual reports are littered with references to television appearances by its executive team and its latest media releases. The advocacy category is appropriate for TAI despite its otherwise sophisticated outputs (the typological designation does not judge the quality of an institute's research).

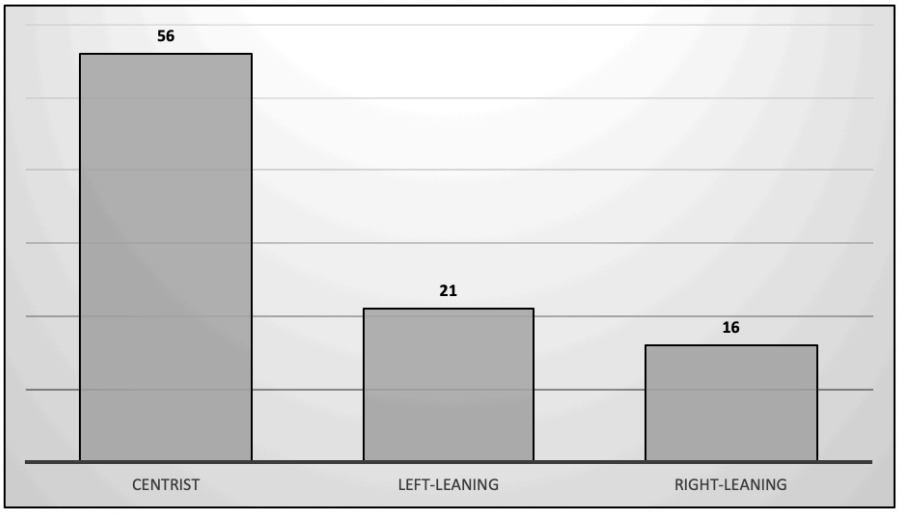
4.2.5 Ideological Persuasions

Judging by prior scholarly works, one might suppose that right-leaning institutes dominate the Australian think tank scene. However, the present study instead finds that left-leaning institutes handsomely outnumber those on the right. Despite this predominance, it has been more common for scholars to interrogate the ideas produced by right-leaning institutes (see, for example, Mendes, 2003; Cahill, 2004; Cahill and Beder, 2005; M. Smith and Marden, 2008; Thackrah, 2012; Cahill, 2013; Lingard, 2015; Reid, 2015; Kelly, 2017; Cahill and Humphrys, 2019). In contrast, it is challenging to locate (any) scholarly works that directly confront the outputs and impacts of left-leaning think tanks (some contributions that focus on centrist institutes include Stone, 1996; Crase et al., 2011; Loughland and Thompson, 2016; Cooper and Smart, 2017; Pincus, 2018).

There are several ways to interpret this disjunction. First, it might reflect beliefs that right-leaning think tanks produce research that lacks substance, objectivity or intellectual independence, thereby attracting justifiable critiques. Alternatively, it might suggest a skewed (left-leaning) orientation within academia, where scholar's personal philosophies naturally lead them to impugn right-leaning organisations. Or it might instead suggest that right-leaning think tanks have greater success in influencing public opinion and policy measures, thus encouraging concern regarding the nature of their ideas. The present thesis makes no assessment in this regard. The primary point here is that while the industry is reasonably well-balanced ideologically, and a competitive marketplace for ideas exists across the political spectrum, the scholarly examination of Australian think tanks is heavily skewed.

Figure 4.6 illustrates the aggregate ideological orientations of Australian think tanks.[59] Appendix H contains the complete list of the assessed orientations.

Figure 4-6: Think tank ideological orientation (by number of institutes)



Centrist institutes dominate the Australian think tank scene, and those with a structural affiliation make up 57 per cent of this centrist cohort (thirty-two out of fifty-six). The centrist classifications are likely to be the most contentious of the three groupings. For example, the Grattan Institute positions itself as a 'non-partisan think tank providing independent, rigorous and practical solutions to some of the country's most pressing problems' (Grattan, 2021). In this study, Grattan is considered a centrist institute, but some industry practitioners have different views.

The Executive Director of the right-leaning Institute of Public Affairs, John Roskam, asserts that Grattan 'presents itself as a centrist whereas I think it is centre-left because it invariably argues for higher taxes' (interview, 2019). At the same time, Wayne Swan, the National President of the Australian Labor Party (and former Deputy PM), claims that 'the only centre-right think tank left in the country is the Grattan Institute' (interview, 2019).[60] And

[59] This thesis uses a combination of methods to determine Ideological orientations. First, all government-affiliated entities are considered centrist, consistent with the legislative requirements of the Public Service Act (Commonwealth of Australia, 1999). Second, university-affiliated entities are categorised as centrist (aside from the Whitlam Institute and the PM Glynn Institute). For all other entities, web page ideological references are cross-referenced with other entity outputs to confirm their consistency. If there are no identifiable website references to a specific ideology, other key phrases that align with left- and right-leaning ideologies are assessed (referencing Fenna, 2014). An entity is classified as centrist if this process detects no discernible ideological orientation.

[60] Swan implies that the other free-market/conservative institutes are on the far-right.

Emma Dawson, the Executive Director of the progressive think tank Per Capita, suggests that Grattan 'like[s] to position themselves as very centrist, non-partisan; [but] no-one's non-ideological, no-one on earth doesn't have an ideology of some sort' (interview, 2019b). These divergent assessments perversely demonstrate that Grattan is at ease proposing policy measures that align with those on the political left or right. Grattan allows its research findings (the evidence) to inform its policy prescriptions, not an institutionalised ideology.

Think tank size distributions across the left- and right-leaning categories are similar, demonstrating that the marketplace for ideas is well-balanced from an ideological and resource perspective. Of the 'large' institutes, there are four (25 per cent) on the right and six (29 per cent) on the left. Similarly, there are nine (56 per cent) 'small' institutes on the right and eleven (52 per cent) on the left. Section 4.3 more extensively examines the financial resources of Australian think tanks.

4.3 Financial Circumstances

The financial circumstances of policy institutes are a crucial determinant of operational effectiveness.[61] They substantially impact the breadth of an institute's focus, the style of research produced, and the methods employed to advance policy ideas. Despite these dependencies, the scholarly examination of think tank financial circumstances has been underwhelming. Think tank scholars have provided compelling accounts regarding the centrality of ideas, but there is limited discussion on the associated resource requirements that facilitate the production and diffusion of these ideas (see, for example, Peschek, 1987; J. Smith, 1991; Ricci, 1993; Abelson, 1996; Weidenbaum, 2009). This section examines think tank financial circumstances in detail.

4.3.1 Financial Context

Think tank expense data are useful supplements to the income data used to determine institute size. Expense data control for the inherent lumpiness in think tank revenue streams and, in some circumstances, more accurately depict institutes' financial circumstances. For example, the Grattan Institute has a substantial investment portfolio (approximately $25

[61] The term 'financial circumstances' is preferred to 'financial resources' because it more broadly references an institute's asset base and its funding conditions (or avenues to the accumulation of assets).

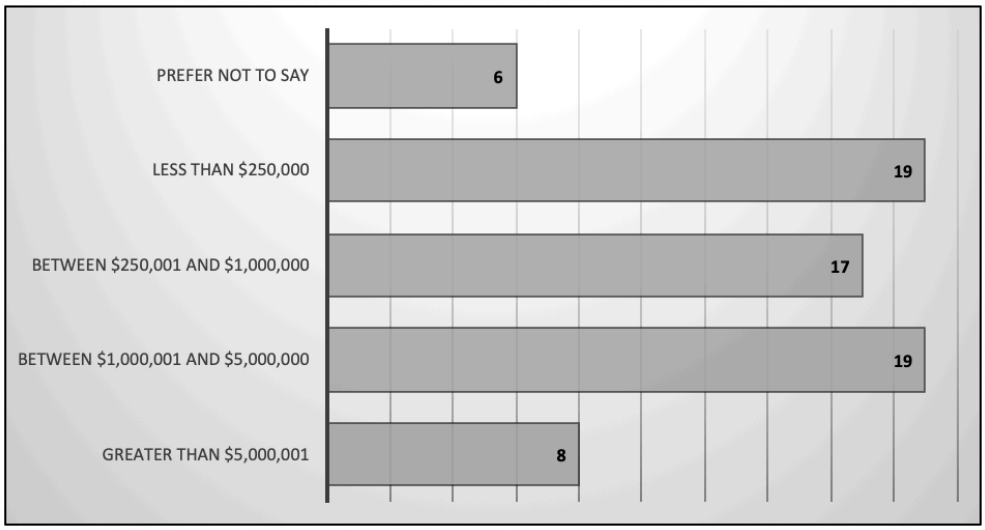
million as at financial year-end 2020), whose performance is wholly dependent upon the vagaries of the financial markets. Grattan's 'interest and investment income' from this investment portfolio amounted to a handsome $4.5 million in 2017/18. But Grattan incurred a *loss* of approximately $0.3 million on this portfolio in 2019/20. At the same time, Grattan's annual operating expenses were near unchanged (approximately $5.6 million) over the three years ended 2019/20 (Grattan, 2018a, p. 12; 2019, p. 12; 2020, p. 12). The expense data clearly give a more consistent and accurate sense of the scale of the business.

Similarly, the Lowy Institute for International Policy received approximately $8.4 million in 'donation income' from The Lowy Foundation in the financial year 2018/19, whereas this amount fell to approximately $2.9 million in 2019/20 (Lowy, 2019, p. 23; 2020, p. 23). On the other hand, Lowy's expenses were in a tight range over the three years ended 2019/20 (at approximately $9 million) (Lowy, 2018, p. 10; 2019, p. 10; 2020, p. 10). While Grattan and Lowy are outliers in terms of their financial wherewithal, the point is clear: relying solely on revenues as an indicator of financial strength can lead to fallacious conclusions.

Figure 4.7 categorises the annual expense budgets of Australian think tanks.[62] The industry appears well-balanced with an even distribution of entities across the separate budget categories. But the budgets of the eight entities whose annual expenses exceed five million dollars are a *minimum* twenty times larger than the nineteen policy institutes seeking to produce competitive ideas at the bottom end of the scale.[63] These budget disparities provide important context when assessing the supposed influence of policy institutes.

[62] Data sourced from this study's think tank surveys. Two respondents elected not to answer this question (n=69).
[63] Several of the entities in the 'prefer not to say' category are also likely to fit into this 'bulge-bracket' category, based on the earlier ACNC classifications.

Figure 4-7: Think tank expense budgets (by number of institutes)



The financial resources of those at the top suggest they might have a greater capacity to influence. However, Halpin (2014, p. 180) asserts that 'capacity is not simply about number of employees or budget, it is about the way that groups expend resources to build specific capabilities that assist it to do certain types of policy work.' In other words, resources allow think tanks to *build* capacities to influence, but they do not themselves *constitute* capacities to influence. Policy institute resource endowments – critical for building policy capacities – can be readily gleaned from annual financial reports. These publicly available accounts facilitate a more detailed examination (and understanding) of policy institute activities and methods. In short, they permit the construction of context.

This section's ensuing financial analysis focuses on a purposive sample of ten institutes. The sample includes seven prominent think tanks and three other leading institutes. The term 'prominent' is used purposively here (following Halpin and Fraussen, 2017). In this study, policy institutes are deemed prominent if political and media elites recognise them as possessing pre-eminent intellectual resources pertinent to a particular policy field.[64] This prominence depends on these elites desiring the institute's intellectual resources and accepting the institute as a credible interlocutor on policy issues. Grossman (2012, p. 92) contends that prominence is a necessary (but insufficient) condition for interest group

[64] Prominence is assessed across several metrics, including media citations, *Hansard* citations, participation in parliamentary inquiries, multi-media activities, access to federal government Ministers, and identification by parliamentarians and journalists in this study's original survey. Appendix I details the measurement of each of these metrics for the sample entities. Chapter's Six and Seven discuss the data sources.

influence and that relatively few entities attain this designation. Unsurprisingly, the wealthiest institutes in the present study achieve this status. Table 4.1 presents the prominent institutes in the present population.

Table 4-1: Prominent think tanks

Policy Institute	Rationale
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	Dominant business- and economic-focussed institute
Grattan Institute	Dominant domestic policy institute
Lowy Institute	Dominant international affairs institute
The Australia Institute	Dominant left-leaning institute
Centre for Independent Studies	Dominant right-leaning institute (joint)
Institute of Public Affairs	Dominant right-leaning institute (joint)
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	Dominant strategic and national security institute
Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics	Government entity
Australian Human Rights Commission	Government entity
Australian Institute of Criminology	Government entity
Australian Institute of Family Studies	Government entity
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Government entity
Australian Law Reform Commission	Government entity
Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics	Government entity
Productivity Commission	Government entity

Table 4.1 shows that the eight government-affiliated institutes in the present population (by their nature) are prominent. Nevertheless, the sample financial analysis here only includes the seven *un*affiliated entities. Three smaller institutes – Per Capita, Centre for Policy Development and the AIIA – are added to this prominent seven to contextualise the analysis. These three well-regarded institutes are outside the top tier of 'taken-for-granted' entities, but their inclusion in the analysis helps to illustrate how quickly think tank financial resources atrophy beyond the top tier (Halpin and Fraussen, 2017, p. 3).[65] Table 4.2 details some of the important financial metrics that inform the analysis in this section.[66]

[65] These three institutes were the most frequently identified autonomous entities (outside the 'prominent' entities) in existing think tank population lists.

[66] All data sourced from institute annual reports. See (AIIA, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020b), (ASPI, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020), (TAI, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020a), (CEDA, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2020), (CIS, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2019b, 2020a), (CPD, 2016a, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020), (Grattan, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2019, 2020), (IPA, 2016, 2017a, 2018, 2019a, 2020a), (Lowy, 2016a, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020), (Per Capita, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019b, 2020).

Table 4-2: Selected think tank financial metrics

Policy Institute	Capital ($m) FY 2020	Net Income ($m) FY 2016-2020	Revenue ($m) FY 2016-2020	Cash ($m) FY 2020
Australian Institute of International Affairs	1.47	0.11	3.77	0.42
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	2.90	1.50	42.85	2.95
The Australia Institute	3.92	2.50	19.46	3.48
CEDA	10.06	6.76	58.36	2.70
Centre for Independent Studies	6.89	1.25	21.06	2.25
Centre for Policy Development	0.24	0.09	4.61	0.77
Grattan Institute	31.39	-9.10	18.23	7.69
Institute of Public Affairs	4.04	2.07	28.91	NA
Lowy Institute	5.47	0.99	48.07	11.28
Per Capita	0.15	0.49	3.17	0.18

There are many items of interest in the data. First and foremost, the net income performance of these entities (that is, revenues minus expenses) over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20 is strikingly different. In aggregate, over these five years, the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) is the most profitable (by a significant margin) with approximately $6.8 million in net earnings. Impressive, for a not-for-profit entity. CEDA has assembled a $9.0 million investment portfolio (as of June 30, 2020) that provides a welcome additional income stream (although not quite rivalling the Grattan Institute's).[67] Following CEDA, the largest net income generators are The Australia Institute (TAI) and the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), with approximately $2.5 million and $2.1 million respectively (in aggregate) over these five years.

The case of The Australia Institute (TAI) is interesting. The progressive institute has the second-lowest aggregate revenue number (over these five years) of the seven prominent entities in this sample. And yet it is the second-most profitable after CEDA (measured by aggregate net income). These numbers imply that TAI is *spending* considerably less than the other entities in this bulge bracket, either due to operational efficiencies or, more evidently, a comparatively modest investment in its platform – circumstances unpacked further in Chapter Seven.

In contrast to the consistent profitability of other prominent institutes, the Lowy Institute has been predominantly loss-making over the sample period. Indeed, after extracting donation income in 2018/19, Lowy has been profitable in only one of these five years (a modest haul of $30,029 in 2015/16). However, profitability seems to matter little given the

[67] CEDA accrued $583,178 in investment income in 2018/19, but it fell to $84,325 in 2020 (CEDA, 2019a, p. 17).

financial resources of Lowy's wealthy benefactor Sir Frank Lowy – Australia's ninth-richest person (Bailey and Sprague, 2021). Lowy fully invests its income into its ongoing activities and its ideational capabilities, wholly consistent with the dictates of its charitable status. Above all else, Lowy privileges its capacity to influence.

The Lowy Institute is not the only prominent think tank to benefit from lumpy contributions. The Grattan Institute's initial endowment of $30 million – divided equally between the Commonwealth and Victorian state governments in 2009 – was augmented by subsequent donations of $4 million from BHP Billiton Limited and $1 million from the National Australia Bank (see Grattan, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). Grattan is the behemoth amongst Australia's autonomous think tanks. Its capital base (assets minus liabilities) of approximately $31 million dwarfs that of its nearest rival – approximately $10 million held by CEDA (CEDA, 2020; Grattan, 2020). Indeed, Grattan's capital base has exceeded the *combined* capital bases of these nine remaining sample institutes every year since its inception in 2009, except for the latest financial year 2020.[68]

The capital positions of the two smallest entities in this sample starkly illustrate the concentration of resources at the top. The Centre for Policy Development (CPD) and Per Capita have awkwardly low capital positions: $238,436 and $151,481, respectively, as at June 30, 2020 (CPD, 2020; Per Capita, 2020). These institutes have limited capacity to expand their activities or invest in their platform without elevating income generation. But despite their relatively limited resources, CPD and Per Capita have been able to energetically and effectively prosecute their varied objectives (interviews with Dawson, 2019b; T. McLeod, 2019).

Accommodation (rental or lease) commitments are a large expense for most entities, and therefore represent a potential source of financial pressure. Again, the circumstances surrounding these obligations markedly diverge for this cohort. The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) took an aggressive step to bolster its future capacity-to-influence by *purchasing* premises in the Sydney central business district for $5.9 million in 2016 (CIS, 2016, p. 4). The CIS now owns this property outright, having paid down the credit facilities used to support its

[68] In these sample five years, Grattan's capital base exceeded the capital bases of the nine remaining sample entities by approximately $24 million in 2015, $14 million in 2016, $11million in 2017, $8 million in 2018, and $1 million in 2019. The combined capital bases of these nine sample entities exceeded Grattan's by approximately $4 million in 2020. See the annual reports for AIIA, ASPI, TAI, CEDA, CIS, CPD, Grattan, IPA, Lowy, and Per Capita from 2015 to 2020. Grattan incurred substantial net losses in 2016 ($4.2 million) and 2020 ($4.4 million) as a result of changes in the value of its investment portfolio.

original purchase. The CIS is in an enviable financial position with no debt and no rental obligations (see CIS, 2018a, 2019b, 2020a). It is important not to underestimate the materiality of such a move. The CIS has bolstered its policy capacity at the organisational level by elevating its 'operational competencies' – its ability to 'mobilise and deploy resources' to support its policy work (Wu et al., 2018, p. 10). The institute is essentially unencumbered and can funnel the vast majority of its revenues into analytical capacities at the individual level (Wu et al., 2018, p. 6).

In contrast, the AIIA *sold* its Canberra-based premises for $2.3 million in 2017 and used the proceeds to pay down debt (with the residual going into an investment portfolio valued at $979,742, as at financial year end 2020) (AIIA, 2017, 2018, 2020b). The Grattan Institute benefits from 'in-kind' (rent-free) accommodation arrangements with the University of Melbourne, meaning that its only significant annual expense is compensation-related (nearly 90 per cent of its annual expenses in the 2020 financial year). In comparison, the modestly endowed Centre for Policy Development incurred lease expenses of $74,274 in 2019/20 (CPD, 2020).

These physical accommodation arrangements are crucial components of an institute's financial circumstances. Those with desirable circumstances, such as the CIS and Grattan, do not suffer the cash flow considerations that other institutes must contemplate when pursuing their objectives. Indeed, under challenging economic conditions – such as those created by the Covid-19 pandemic – cash management becomes a critical issue for many Australian think tanks – but less so for Grattan and the CIS. Think tank credibility critically depends upon ideational consistency. Financial challenges can arise from a myriad of sources, and those unequipped to deal with those challenges are likely to be marginalised in a competitive ideas marketplace.

4.3.2 Funding

Funding consistency has an important impact on think tank effectiveness. Institutes are less likely to impact policy debates if they only intermittently participate in policy discussions or only occasionally proffer meaningful content. An understanding of the sources of think tank funds can therefore assist in assessing think tank influence claims.

Policy institutes of all sizes have benefited from the government's demand for externally generated ideas. Ian Marsh (1980) previously urged the Australian government to financially

support the development of the local think tank industry, and successive federal governments have acted accordingly.[69] Commonwealth grants are now an important source of income for many autonomous (unaffiliated) think tanks. The government's Grant Connect website provides access to this funding data, and this study has investigated the receipt of government funds by all ninety-three institutes in the Australian think tank population.[70] The results are illuminating (Appendix J provides a full list of results).

Some think tanks spurn prospective government funding, with the right-leaning Centre for Independent Studies and Institute of Public Affairs two notable examples. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the CIS proudly announced that it had 'decided to reject the federal Government's Job Keeper allowance and other taxpayer support offers' (Switzer, 2020).[71] On the other hand, some entities openly covet government support and substantially rely on government grants to sustain their operations. For example, the AIIA accrued 24 per cent and 51 per cent of its total annual revenues from grants in 2019 and 2020, respectively (AIIA, 2019, 2020b).[72] In the financial year ended 2020 (capturing the impact of the Covid-19 lockdowns), the AIIA saw its 'conference income' fall 56 per cent and 'donations' income fall 93 per cent from the prior year, necessitating 'government support income' to help it break even (see AIIA, 2020b, pp. 5, 19).

But of all the grants presented in Appendix J, one's gaze is naturally drawn to the $22 million allocated by the Department of Defence to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) on August 3, 2018.[73] The grant covers five years (until June 30, 2023) and seeks to 'promote informed discourse and debate […] by creating and disseminating new insights, concepts, understandings and policy recommendations relevant to the Australian

[69] Chapter Five shows that funding support for independent think tanks substantially commenced during the Prime Ministership of John Howard.

[70] The Commonwealth government has disclosed Grant Awards via the Grant Connect website since December 31, 2017 (see GrantConnect, 2019). This search was conducted on December 1, 2019, for the period commencing on December 31, 2017, up until the search date.

[71] Nevertheless, the CIS has welcomed sponsorship dollars from the Reserve Bank of Australia since 2006, diluting its attempt to demonstrate its devotion to fundamental neoliberal principles (Wright, 2020).

[72] In 2019, AIIA's grant income was $227,334 out of a total revenue base of $941,575, and in 2020, the AIIA attracted $382,987 in grant funding out of a total revenue base of $744,197 (AIIA, 2019, 2020b). It is not clear whether the entirety of this grant income originates from the Commonwealth government. Wakefield (2021, p. 3) states that the AIIA received a more modest $122,900 from the Commonwealth in 2019.

[73] ASPI has had heavy exposure to government grant income since its inception (in 2001) but recorded its lowest proportion (34 per cent) of government income versus its overall income in 2019/20 (ASPI, 2020, p. 21).

Government' (GrantConnect, 2019). Such a sizable bestowal suggests that the Department of Defence derives substantial value from ASPI's policy contributions.

Government grants to the following entities further evidence the value attached to think tank ideational contributions:

- the Regional Australia Institute ($1.32 million), 'to provide advice […] on effective regional development policy' (GrantConnect, 2019);
- the Institute for Regional Security ($97,900), 'to deliver high quality policy advice' (GrantConnect, 2019);
- SAGE International Australia ($517,063), for 'analysing and unpacking the Indo-Pacific area' (interview with Bruni, 2019; GrantConnect, 2019).

The Commonwealth and state governments have played a vital role in developing Australia's think tank industry. Over the past two decades, some of Australia's most recognised policy institutes owe their existence to government start-up funding. The apparent success of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute – the recipient of the Australian government's first significant investment in an autonomous think tank – seems to have encouraged subsequent investments. The Commonwealth government has provided foundational grants (or endowments) to the Grattan Institute, the Regional Australia Institute, the United States Studies Centre, the Perth USAsia Centre and China Matters. Table 4.3 details the seed-funding amounts.[74]

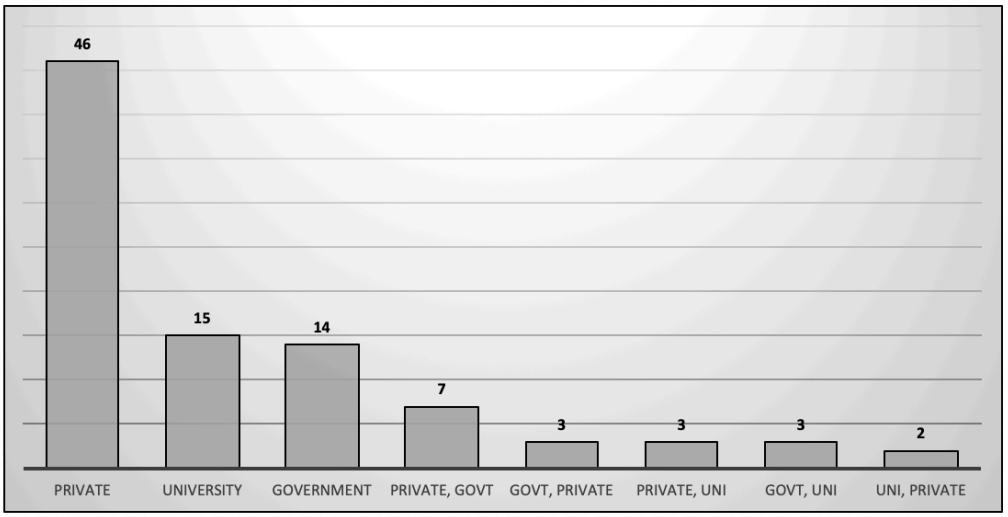
Table 4-3: Government start-up funding

Policy Institute	Year established	Government seed-funding	Governing party
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	2001	$2.0mm	Coalition
United States Studies Centre	2007	$25.0mm	Coalition
Grattan Institute	2008	$15.0mm	ALP
Regional Australia Institute	2012	$8.0mm	ALP
Perth USAsia Centre	2013	$0.4mm	ALP
China Matters	2015	$0.3mm	Coalition

[74] As previously noted, the Grattan Institute received additional funds from the Victorian government, BHP Billiton, and National Australia Bank.

Some think tanks (such as the Lowy Institute) also receive substantial government funding for ongoing projects. For example, Lowy's elaborate *Pacific Aid Map* is 'completely funded by DFAT' (interview with Dayant, 2019). Overall, at least 29 per cent of the Australian think tank industry receives some sort of government funding, as Figure 4.8 illustrates.[75] Ian Marsh's vision has become a reality.

Figure 4-8: Think tank funding sources (by number of institutes)



Away from government endowments and grants, a conspicuous question remains: who else funds Australia's autonomous public policy institutes? Some think tanks limit (or standardise) external contributions to protect and authenticate their purported independence. For example, the Australia Defence Association does not 'take money above $5,000-a-year from anyone who has a commercial relationship with the Department of Defence and intelligence and security agencies' (interview with James, 2019). Similarly, the Committee for Sydney applies a flat membership fee of $16,500 to ensure it balances the potentially conflicting interests of its varied members (interview with Waterford, 2019).

More generally, determining funding sources is a challenging task. There is a broad reluctance amongst autonomous policy institutes to provide donor transparency. According to Transparify – an international watchdog that rates think tank financial transparency – Australia had *zero* 'highly transparent' and only two 'broadly transparent' think tanks in 2018

[75] This funding data was sourced from think tanks' 2018 annual financial accounts (and other publicly available sources). Appendix K details the methodology used for these classifications. In aggregate, twenty-seven of Australia's ninety-three policy institutes receive government income, although the number might be larger due to the challenges in tracing funding sources.

(Gutbrod, 2018).[76] This lack of funding transparency impacts impressions of think tank credibility and intellectual independence, as commonly revealed in this study's interview data. One right-leaning federal parliamentarian comments:

> I'm always concerned that think tanks are basically funded for – or are paid for – recommendations, and are sort of no different from hiring a consulting firm to do something with a specific policy outcome in mind (Anonymous Interviewee N, 2020).

There has been a common fascination with the funding arrangements of the prominent right-leaning think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs. The IPA is frequently maligned for the lack of transparency around its benefactors, and the IPA indeed provides little clarity in this regard (Farrelly, 2016; Seccombe, 2018; Barro, 2019). But the IPA is certainly not the only institute that suppresses the identity of its patrons. Oddly, there is little scrutiny of the IPA's antithetical cousin – The Australia Institute – in a similar way. The strict application of the Transparify ranking criteria would see The Australia Institute, *at best*, ranked in line with the IPA for financial transparency – both would receive zero stars out of five (for the Transparify criteria, see Gutbrod, 2018). However, while the IPA provides details on membership numbers and the number of donations it receives, The Australia Institute provides no such detail (IPA, 2020a, pp. 36-37). These circumstances are particularly ironic given The Australia Institute's promotion of their so-called '*Accountability Program'* and the suggestive title of its regular podcast, '*Follow the Money*'. Such contradictions are not lost on political elites. One left-leaning federal parliamentarian confesses:

> So, I don't trust The Australia Institute. I am starting to question where they are getting their funding from, and I am watching very carefully the way they are advocating in the whole ACCC media issue. And I suspect that – and the reason why I think the funding is important is because I would love to know who funds them (Anonymous Interviewee R, 2020).

It is now a matter of public record that Gina Rinehart – Australia's richest person – provides a large slice of IPA funding.[77] As part of its ruling in the *Rinehart v Rinehart (2018)* case, the New South Wales Supreme Court identifies donations of $2.3 million and $2.2 million (in 2016 and 2017, respectively) from Hancock Prospecting Pty Ltd (Gina Rinehart's private

[76] Transparify's analyses depend on how they define their think tank universe.
[77] Gina Rinehart has a net worth of approximately $31 billion according to the Australian Financial Review Rich List 2021 (Bailey and Sprague, 2021).

mining company) to the IPA. It has been implied (or asserted) that the IPA's relationship with Gina Rinehart explicitly impinges on its independence (Readfearn, 2018; Seccombe, 2018; Barro, 2019). While such allegations are difficult to substantiate, accusations or conclusions of this kind might equally apply to other entities. For example, the progressive think tank Per Capita transparently details the six core-funders of its '*Progressive Economics Program*'. Five of these funders are unions, and the sixth is the social justice law firm Maurice Blackburn Lawyers (Per Capita, 2021). Should it be concluded that Per Capita is 'doing the bidding' of the unions from which it receives funds?[78] Not according to Emma Dawson, the Executive Director of Per Capita, who convincingly asserts, 'we have very clear editorial guidelines, editorial independence, and that is put into every funding agreement we have' (interview, 2019b).

Arguments suggesting that the preferences of financial sponsors might bias the ideas of purportedly intellectually independent institutes should be ideologically neutral. The originators of such claims should also contemplate the counterfactual: would entities such as the IPA or The Australia Institute amend their views in the absence of funding from their major sponsors? Given their enduring devotion to libertarianism and progressivism, that is unlikely. In short, asserting that think tanks are intellectually subservient to third-party sponsors is convenient and superficial.

It should come as no surprise that individuals (such as Gina Reinhart) or entities (such as the National Union of Workers) sponsor think tanks that advance ideas consistent with their own philosophies and values. Figure 4.8 showed that 49 per cent of Australian think tanks are substantially or entirely reliant upon private funding. The competition of ideas is also a competition for funding. And private funding will logically come from those that endorse the cause or ideology of the relevant institute. Until evidence is produced that illustrates otherwise, commentators should not reflexively dismiss think tank declarations regarding the separation of funding sources and intellectual outputs. Such declarations include:

> The unions that put money into our progressive economics program do so on the basis that they don't get to dictate what we say (interview with Dawson, 2019b).
>
> I think we'll have annoyed or disappointed different funders with our policy proposals at various points. So how do we solve for that? First, on everything we do, we make it clear that we have full editorial discretion and editorial independence (interview and email with Travers McLeod, Centre for Policy Development, 2019, 2020).

[78] The McKell Institute equally demonstrates the case here. McKell derives 33 per cent of its funding from unions, 39 per cent from corporates, and 26 per cent from contract work (see McKell, 2019).

> I don't know how Tom [Switzer – the current CIS Executive Director] runs the place these days but Greg [Lindsay – former Executive Director] had some very strong views about keeping research and money a long way apart. So, the researchers hardly ever spent any time with donors […] because Greg had a view that the research [that CIS scholars] were doing should be academically rigorous and stand up on its own, and it should never be influenced by, you know, subtle or un-subtle understandings on what donors were expecting or liked (interview with Cass Wilkinson, ex-CIS, 2020).

The present study focuses on the influence of think tanks on policymaking and does not prosecute the impact that financial sponsors might have on think tank's cognitive processes. This is a separate question that requires a distinct focus. In this regard, Fraussen and Halpin (2017, p. 115) find that less than 25 per cent of Australian think tanks allow donor's preferences to persuade their research *agenda* (more simply, issue prioritisation). But prudently, these authors make no claims regarding donors' impacts on think tank intellectual outputs. A concluding word on this matter comes from think tank scholar James McGann (2016, pp. 21, 65), who notes that 'establishing a long-term commitment from a set of core donors is crucial to funding' but, 'it is wrong and overly simplistic to suggest, as some authors have, that these funding shifts have resulted in a loss of independence.'

4.4 Summary

This chapter examines the operational and structural diversity of the Australian think tank industry and helps to provide context for the ensuing examination of influence. Diane Stone (1996, p. 117) previously asserted that 'too often, discussions of think tanks have focussed on the issue of policy influence without assessing first if such organisations have the capacity or desire to wield influence.' The present study extensively examines these industry circumstances and, importantly, how these entities build policy capacities. The tremendous diversity in individual institute circumstances discourages generalisations, but it is apparent that prominent institutes have an enduring capacity to pursue their policy preferences, as Chapter Seven examines in greater detail.

This chapter shows that nationally-focussed think tanks dominate the Australian landscape, and the majority of these look like 'universities without students.' While centrist institutes predominate, the ideas marketplace is otherwise well-balanced between right- and left-leaning institutes. The chapter also shows that many Australian think tanks have structural affiliations. But the chapter asserts that structural affiliations do not axiomatically

compromise institutes' intellectual independence. Any suggestion otherwise must be balanced across the ideological spectrum.

An understanding of policy institute financial circumstances is crucial to an understanding of influence. This chapter demonstrates that the Australian government provides crucial support for the industry via start-up funding and ongoing grant income. Nevertheless, it is primarily the private sector that fills the arteries of the industry with the oxygen required to sustain its activities. Chapter Five further examines the evolution of the Australian think tank industry and the important role the government has played in its development.

Chapter Five: The Evolutionary Path

5.1 Introduction

The pace at which think tanks are being created in Australia is increasing. While some countries have long been in the maturity stage of their industry life cycles, Australia only entered the growth stage at the turn of the century. This chapter shows that more Australian think tanks have been established in the past decade than any other in the industry's history. And the pace of institute formation shows few signs of slowing. The overarching purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the Australian think tank industry is fast maturing and that individual institutes are well-positioned to contribute to policymaking.

Section 5.2 of the chapter examines the Australian industry's evolution and explains the reasons for this growth. Section 5.3 further contextualises this evolution by demonstrating that some previously identified growth impediments no longer constrain the industry's development.

Scholars have commonly compared think tanks across jurisdictions to appraise development relativities and contrast institute characteristics (see, for example, I. Marsh, 1980; Stone et al., 1998; McGann and Weaver, 2002; Stone and Denham, 2004; Abelson et al., 2018). Section 5.4 conducts a cross-country analysis to better establish the relative size and scope of the Australian think tank industry. The section shows that the Australian industry is similar in scale to other benchmark nations, when using metrics beyond simplistic institute tallies.

5.2 Development Waves

The emergence of Australian think tanks dates back almost one hundred years to the formation of the Australian Institute of International Affairs in 1924 (AIIA, 2020a).[79] The industry's progress since the AIIA's formation has been well documented, and there is no attempt to reprise that history here (see, for example, Stone, 1993; I. Marsh, 1994; I. Marsh and Stone, 2004; Gyngell, 2016; Kelly, 2017). Instead, this section examines the industry's

[79] Stone (1998, p. 146) suggests that Australia's first 'proto-typical' think tanks were the Institute of Pacific Relations (an antecedent to the AIIA) and The Round Table, but this study could not establish the formation dates of these defunct entities.

broader evolution using the 'wave' framework advanced by scholars in multiple jurisdictions (see, for example, Lindquist, 1989, pp. 2-3, 85-87; Stone, 2000, pp. 156-157; Abelson, 2009, pp. 22-37; Thackrah, 2012, pp. 79-82; McGann, 2016, pp. 27-29).

This section first analyses the Australian think tank industry's development by referencing Marsh and Stone's (2004) 'wave' framework. It shows that the industry's evolution over the past two decades necessitates a revision of these supposed developmental stages. As such, this section proposes an alternative model to account for the changed industry landscape. This new wave model helps provide insights into how and what types of think tanks might be influential.

5.2.1 Marsh and Stone's (2004) Wave Framework

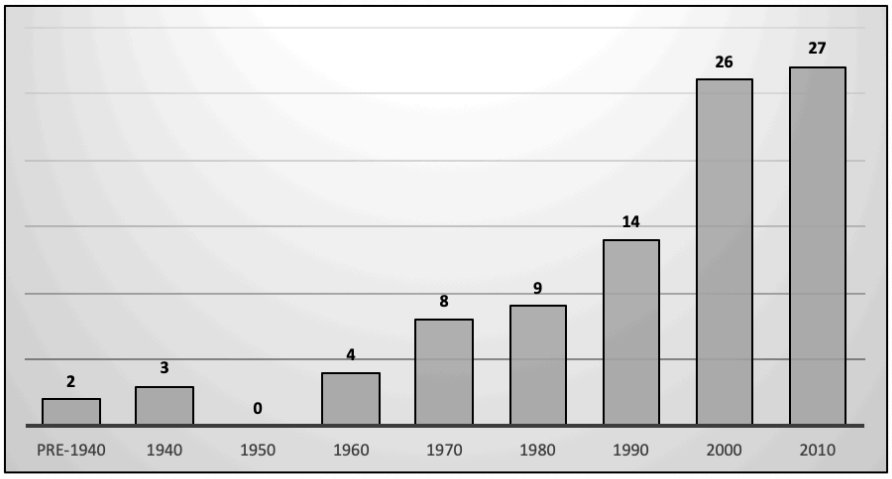
Marsh and Stone (2004, pp. 247-250) posit that Australia's think tank industry has evolved through three discernible 'waves', each heralding the arrival of a new class of institutes (thereby emulating the evolution of the British industry).[80] The first evolutionary wave stretched from pre-World War Two until the mid-1970s but spawned relatively few policy institutes. A second wave purportedly commenced in the mid-1970s where free-market institutes, energised by the politics of the 'New Right', emerged in increased numbers. The third wave (seemingly commencing in the early 1990s) was distinguished by the escalation of left-leaning think tanks in response to the surge of 'neoliberal' institutes in the second wave. The industry landscape and its features have changed dramatically since Marsh and Stone's article, so the ensuing analysis focuses on the continued validity of these original waves (so described).

Marsh and Stone's wave theory can be examined by first charting the creation date of all institutes in the present population. Figure 5.1 breaks down the number of Australian think tanks formed in successive decades (but does not include defunct entities). As noted in Chapter Three, pre-existing think tank lists (dating back to 1980) help to construct the present population, but they also allow for the consideration of survivor bias. Nevertheless, the inclusion of defunct entities in the analysis – as identified in these earlier registers – has very

[80] Marsh and Stone do not precisely define these three periods but provide sufficient guidance to enable their analysis.

little impact on the inferences flowing from Figure 5.1 (other than impacting the absolute numbers themselves).[81]

Figure 5-1: Think tank establishment date (by decade)



* Each bar represents the decade commencing with the labelled year.

Figure 5.1 highlights the remarkable jump in think tank numbers over the past two decades. While Marsh and Stone's (2004) waves are discernible, they more closely resemble ripples with the benefit of history. Indeed, 29 per cent of all Australian think tanks have been established in the past decade alone – more than the sum of all think tanks created up until 1990. But what of the constituent characteristics of Marsh and Stone's (2004) three waves? In essence, the authors' thesis revolves around the formation of ideologically disposed institutes – a readily examinable proposition. The purported emergence of right-wing institutes in the second wave (from 1975-1989) and left-wing institutes in the third wave (from 1990-2000) is analysed here using a modified population (to address the issue of survivor bias).[82]

Only four of the fifteen institutes formed in Marsh and Stone's second wave are right-leaning (the Centre for Independent Studies, HR Nicholls Society, The Sydney Institute and the

[81] Most of the defunct institutes in prior think tank lists (sixteen of the one-hundred-and-eighty-four entities originally identified) were government- or university-affiliated entities, not ideologically oriented (left- and right-leaning) entities. This point is important in the wave theory context. To be sure, many of the defunct entities are unlikely to have been included in this study even if they had endured. The main text discusses the defunct entities with a discernible ideological bias.

[82] The 'modified population' includes the present study's population (ninety-three institutes) *plus* six defunct institutes extracted from extant lists (see Chapter Three). These defunct entities have been assessed for definitional conformity using the same inclusion criteria detailed in Chapter Three.

now-defunct Australian Institute of Public Policy).[83] Just five of the twenty-two institutes formed in the third wave are left-leaning (the Chifley Research Centre, The Australia Institute, the Whitlam Institute, and the two defunct entities, WETtank and the Brisbane Institute). Indeed, the third wave spawned *more* right-leaning think tanks (seven) than those leaning left.[84] It is apparent that Marsh and Stone's (2004) evolutionary 'waves' exist only at the margins – even after allowing for extinct entities.

Marsh and Stone's wave framework is equivocal. It seems designed to fit the broader evolution in the external political environment rather than representing a phenomenon in and of itself. To be clear, there is no suggestion here that these philosophical waves did not occur more broadly (unrelated to the development of the think tank industry): Quiggin (2005) provides ample support for this case. But the impact of these philosophical waves on the evolution of the think tank industry seems to have greater pertinence in the United Kingdom and the United States (see Denham and Garnett, 1999; McGann, 2016). The Australian case, as conceived, is less convincing.

5.2.2 An Alternative Wave Framework

The wave framework nevertheless remains an appropriate means to explain think tank industry evolution. With new data available, it is possible to develop a refined model that more precisely captures the various stages of the industry's development. The arrival of new think tanks is the primary determinant of the successive waves in this refined model (consistent with Marsh and Stone), although the model also considers the evolution in the focus and methods of incumbent think tanks.

This section posits that the Australian think tank industry has evolved through four waves. Table 5.1 details these stages and precisely identifies each wave's inferred period. The alternative framework accounts for the discernible impacts of political and social events, and the evolution of political philosophy on think tank formation (following McGann, 2007, p. 27; Abelson, 2009, pp. 22-37).

[83] The Australian Institute of Public Policy was established in 1982 and merged with the IPA in 1991 (I. Marsh and Stone, 2004, p. 248). As such, it is not a constituent of the present population.

[84] Right-leaning think tanks formed during this third wave include the Menzies Research Centre, Institute for Private Enterprise, Mannkal Economic Education Foundation, Samuel Griffith Society, and the defunct Tasman Institute, Bennelong Society, and Lavoisier Group.

Table 5-1: Think tank development waves – an alternative framework

Wave #	Era (distinctive period)	Years	Wave (distinguishing feature)	New Think Tanks (modified total*)	New Think Tanks (per year)	Orientation			Ideological (% of total)
						Left	Centrist	Right	
First	Formative Era	Pre 1983	Formative years	21	na	3	15	3	29%
Second	Hawke-Keating Era	1983-1996	Rise of the ideologues	17	1.2	3	8	6	53%
Third	Howard Era	1997-2007	The ideas marketplace	28	2.5	6	17	5	39%
Fourth	Online Era	2008 plus	Digital wave	34	2.6	11	16	7	53%

* The table includes one hundred think tanks. This modified count includes the six defunct institutes that are consistent with this study's think tank definition (plus the newly-formed Blueprint Institute).

The alternative framework's second and third waves both commence with notable political events (the election of consequential Prime Ministers). The fourth wave commences at the end of the Howard era and is distinguished by think tanks' first steps into the digital world. The evolution across the four waves is in itself important because it evidences the industry's adaptation to changed political and social circumstances, and indicates why policy institutes have proliferated in more recent times.

The first wave starts with the formation of the AIIA in 1924 and runs through to 1982. Just twenty-one think tanks were established during this period (on a modified population basis). This six-decade period is arguably too lengthy to call a 'wave' but, consistent with the retroductive processes germane to critical realism, there are few patterns or distinguishable features in the *data* that might explain (or justify) a further partitioning of this period. Of course, this period was characterised by many significant *events*. But did those events have an impact on the types or pace of policy institute formation? Apparently not. Or if so, only at the margins. I. Marsh and Stone (2004) posit that 'New Right' ideas became more prevalent in the 1970s, but the data does not support an earlier end to this 'formative years' wave in the alternative model.

Just as the elections of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US ushered in new eras for think tanks (see J. Smith, 1991, pp. 7-8; Denham, 1996; Stahl, 2016, pp. 96-133), Bob Hawke's election as Australian Prime Minister in 1983 was similarly consequential.[85] Cahill (2004, pp. 44, 145) sets out a convincing case that Australia's affinity with neoliberalism became institutionalised in the Hawke-Keating era, asserting that 'it was

[85] Robert (Bob) Hawke from the Australian Labor Party was elected Prime Minister in 1983 and served until 1991. Paul Keating (also from the ALP) served as Prime Minister from 1991 until 1996. This period is widely referred to as the 'Hawke-Keating era' (Economou, 2014, pp. 172-173).

not until 1983, under the Hawke Labor government, that the state project of neo-liberalism began in earnest' and that during this era both major parties became 'committed to the broad parameters of this neo-liberal state project.' Ian Marsh (2005) and Thackrah (2012) subsequently proffer similar arguments.

The modified data in the present analysis evidences the formation of only two right-leaning institutes from 1975 – the supposed (approximate) beginning of Marsh and Stone's second-wave – until Bob Hawke's election in 1983. But the ensuing Hawke-Keating era (from 1983-1996) saw the formation of six right-leaning institutes. Surprisingly, there were only three left-leaning institutes formed during this Hawke-Keating period. If there was a 'second wave' distinguished by the rise of right-leaning institutes (as per Marsh and Stone), then the Hawke-Keating era best captures it. But more generally, this second wave is distinguished by the rise of the ideologues on both the left and right sides of politics. Fifty-three per cent of all institutes created in this Hawke-Keating era possessed a discernible ideological orientation – far removed from the idealistic notion that think tanks are disinterested purveyors of policy expertise. As McGann (1992, p. 736) contends (from a US perspective), the major trend in this period was toward the politicisation of think tanks.

The alternative model asserts that a third wave commenced with the election of Prime Minister John Howard in 1996 (Marsh and Stone's model implies a third wave approximately commenced in the early 1990s).[86] The Howard era (from 1996 until 2007) impressively spawned twenty-eight new institutes (on a modified basis) with a modest ideological bias toward left-leaning institutes. But the era is distinguished by the returned predominance of centrist institutes, totalling 61 per cent of all new think tanks. The political access and policy influence of this burgeoning think tank population might have diverged along ideological lines, but the overall population was ideologically well balanced during this period (for competing accounts of the influence of right-leaning think tanks on the Howard government, see Cahill, 2013; Kelly, 2017, p. 229).

The Howard era is also distinguished by one of the pivotal moments in the history of the Australian industry. Early in Howard's first term, the Defence Minister, Ian McLaughlin, persuaded the Prime Minister that 'policy advice needed to be contestable' (Gyngell, 2016, p.

[86] The present analysis references 1990 as the start date for Marsh and Stone's 'third-wave'. Only one think tank (the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research) was established in 1990, so the results are not sensitive to that selection.

275). Discussions in this regard led to the formation (and funding) of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in 2001. This initiative signalled that the federal government had become amenable to the introduction of privately generated policy ideas (notwithstanding earlier efforts to encourage university-originated policy contributions). Additionally, Prime Minister Howard's inclination to privilege centralism, and his determination to reduce the footprint of the Australian Public Service,[87] made this a transformational period for the think tank industry (Stewart and Maley, 2014, pp. 81-82; Summers and Lowe, 2014, pp. 97-98).

This thesis stops short of uniquely crediting Prime Ministers' Hawke and Howard for the development of the Australian think tank industry. There is undoubtedly a myriad of other factors at play. For example, intra-party fragmentation, inter-party polarisation, and broadly unstable leadership have become more prominent features of Australian politics in recent years (Gauja, 2015). These developments have potentially increased the access points and demand for think tank expertise. Nevertheless, this thesis does assert that these Prime Ministers fostered a changed political and social climate that invigorated a competition in ideas. Howard, in particular, took steps to encourage the contribution of externally generated ideas into the policy process. But in sum, both governments stimulated the development of an Australian 'ideas marketplace', where think tanks finally started to gain some long-coveted prominence (on the ideas marketplace, see Abelson, 2006, pp. 110-126).

The alternative model's fourth wave does not merely denote the end of the Howard era.[88] This era (commencing in 2008) is characterised by societies' increased digital engagement and concomitant changes in the way political participation and social engagement occur. Fung et al. (2013, p. 45) describe the application of digital technology to the political world as an 'intervention' that serves to 'amplify the efforts of organizations'. Vromen (2017) posits that digital citizenship has shaped societal norms and altered how political organisations pursue their objectives. Instructively, Vromen (2017, p. 52) distinguishes the new-found prominence of 'political organisations […] that exist primarily online', and points to Barack Obama's 2008 US Presidential campaign as a moment that

[87] The reduction in APS headcount lessened the ability of the APS to proffer policy ideas – a so-called 'hollowing out of the state' (see Denham and Garnett, 2004). The APS headcount fell from approximately one-hundred-and-forty-three thousand at the end of 1996 (Howard's election year) to a low point of approximately one-hundred-and-ten thousand in 2000. However, the APS headcount exceeded the number Howard originally inherited by the completion of his final year in office in 2006 (Whelan, 2011).

[88] Kevin Rudd from the Australian Labor Party defeated Prime Minister Howard in the Federal election on December 3, 2007.

'heralded a new phase in the use of innovative technology and social media for mobilisation.' Parallels with the Australian think tank industry are readily identifiable. The Lowy Institute openly declares its 'aim to be a world-leading online think tank' and has accordingly invested substantial sums into digital technology (Lowy, 2021c). Lowy has developed sophisticated website interactives – including its *Asia Power Index*, *Pacific Aid Map*, and the *Global Diplomacy Index* – that strikingly illustrate the innovative ways that think tanks engage audiences on political issues.

The alternative framework identifies the formation of thirty-four think tanks since 2008 – the fastest start-up pace across the four waves. Chapter Seven later demonstrates the crucial role that digital technology plays in facilitating think tank engagement with previously inaccessible audiences. But the transformation of think tank activity during this 'digital wave' is best elucidated by practitioners themselves (with italics added).

> Alex Oliver (ex-Director of Research, Lowy Institute): Well, the traditional think tank, and certainly academia, focuses on the written work. *In the last decade*, we have had a shift. We were one of the first; I think we were, in fact, the first think tank to have a blog. [It] seemed like such an obvious thing to do, but *in 2008*, I think we started, it was not obvious (interview, 2019).

> Katie McRobert (General Manager, Australia Farm Institute): It's made a huge difference to the way we operate. It's made a big difference to the responsiveness. One of the reasons we are now holding these [research prioritisation] meetings quarterly rather than annually is because social media can change public opinion within the space of a couple of days, whereas things used to take a long time to flare-up. Even if it were a big issue in the media, it would take a little while for people to start talking and for people to start holding meetings and gather together to discuss their concerns. And then it would become an issue you would take to your MP. That's not the process anymore. *That's ten years ago* (interview, 2019).

> Peter Jennings (Executive Director, ASPI): I think [social media] has had a very positive impact on our business because it's certainly given us access to many more channels of communication than we have had in the past […]. To reach wider audiences […] you really have to have a good crisp nine-hundred words rather than nine-thousand-word reports. To give you one example: Greg Moriarty, the Secretary of Defence, said to one of my council meetings, [or] was talking about how he used our product. And Greg said 'well, I would probably look at what you're producing 3 or 4 times a week' and when we drilled down to find out what he meant, he was really talking about what we do online. I said to him, 'how much do you read; you're a busy guy?'; he said, 'look, I'll give most things 10-paragraphs and, if my interest is captured, I might go on, or I'll move on to the next thing'. So, to me, that's a useful insight into how my top audience interacts with our product. We try to cater to that attention span (interview, 2019).

> John Roskam (Executive Director, IPA): Hugely. Hugely impactful, and we've only just seen the beginning. The cost of distribution is close to zero. […] From my perspective, the main

> thing social media does is: your message is not mediated. *Ten years ago*, you relied on mainstream print press, radio and TV. Now you can put up your own video on YouTube. This is very significant. And we still don't know the full consequences of this (interview, 2019).

In a country where social media usage is amongst the highest in the world (Vromen, 2017, p. 51), the digital era has supercharged an industry that had previously been stoked and then energised in earlier waves. Low-cost delivery systems have empowered policy entrepreneurs and reduced barriers to entry for those interested in systematically prosecuting policy issues.

These transformations have also encouraged incumbent entities to reflect upon their operating models. The Centre for Independent Studies, for example, had primarily focussed on the production of comprehensive research reports (and books) after its foundation in 1976 (interview with Lindsay, 2019). These traditional research outputs saw it comfortably sit within the 'university without students' think tank category. But over the past decade, with the ability to instantaneously engage and (potentially) influence its various audiences, the CIS has become more 'advocacy' oriented, moving away from the prototypical methods that established it as an esteemed interlocutor on policy issues to one which seemingly covets a constant presence on topical issues in the public sphere.

In sum, this section proposes that prior frameworks purporting to explain the evolution of Australia's think tank industry are imprecisely specified. The data presented here more closely support the proposed 'alternative framework'. And the importance of this framework derives from its implications for think tank influence. For example, the rise of the ideologues in the second wave (and their ongoing proliferation) hints at the *types* of policy institutes that might be influential; the opening of political channels to policy institute ideas in the third wave suggests *why* think tanks might be influential, and; the widespread embrace of digital technologies in the fourth wave suggests *how* these institutes might have become influential. The ensuing chapters further explore these themes.

5.3 Development Constraints

Ian Marsh (1980, pp. 90-94) identified the Australian think tank industry's growth impediments when the industry was in its infancy, and upon seeing little progress, revisited these constraints with Diane Stone two decades later. Specifically, Marsh and Stone (2004, p.

252) contend that it was 'difficult to acquire' tax-exempt status in Australia, thereby discouraging the creation of NFP entities. The authors also state that Australia has a 'poorly developed culture of philanthropy', complicating access to the private contributions that sustain the industry.

This section focuses on the constraints embedded in the Australian taxation system and the purported disincentives to philanthropic giving. Neither of these issues has received significant scholarly attention since Marsh and Stone (2004), although t Hart and Vromen (2008, p. 142) do later identify the 'increasing importance' of philanthropic giving to think tanks (in related fields, see McGregor-Lowndes et al., 2006; Sargeant and Crissman, 2006; Cham, 2016). This section shows that these legitimately identified constraints were largely addressed during the Australian think tank industry's evolutionary 'third wave' (as per the alternative framework). The policy initiatives introduced by the Howard government to ameliorate these disincentives have contributed to a burgeoning of think tanks over the past two decades.

The Howard government launched a tax reform agenda in 1999 through the *Prime Minister's Community and Business Partnership.* This program sought to promote public philanthropy by making Australia's tax system 'friendlier to individuals and companies who want to give' (Howard, 2001). The initial provisions were narrow in scope but were amended in 2002 to extend the eligibility of 'deductible gift recipients' (DGRs) – entities that can receive tax-deductible donations. The introduction of charitable trusts in the form of Prescribed Private Funds also facilitated the identification and tax-deductibility of philanthropic donations (Howard, 2001). Prescribed Private Funds (PPFs) were later converted to Private Ancillary Funds (PAFs) under the Rudd government and are now accepted as the 'modern philanthropic structure of choice' (J. McLeod, 2014, p. 4; Cham, 2016, p. 85).

This thesis assessed the DGR status of all Australian think tanks by using the website search features on the Australian Business Register (2020).[89] Fifty of the eighty-five eligible think tanks are DGR-endorsed (59 per cent) and are therefore permitted to receive tax-deductible donations.[90] Tellingly, 62 per cent of this DGR-endorsed group were established

[89] The eight government-affiliated entities in the present population are excluded from this analysis because they are not DGR-eligible.

[90] According to the Australian Taxation Office, think tanks qualify for DGR status if they are Approved Research Institutes. That is, they 'undertake scientific research' and have 'suitably qualified research committees that evaluate the merits of proposed research programs' (ATO, 2017).

after the Howard-era reforms. The data suggest that the tax reforms have played a role in expanding the Australian think tank industry.

But have the Howard-era reforms actually promoted philanthropic giving in Australia? According to John McLeod – co-founder of JBWere Philanthropic Services – the answer is 'definitely'. McLeod states:

> We never had a system that allowed people to put money into a foundation; get a tax deduction when they put the money in; and then do their philanthropy within that foundation for the next fifty or hundred years […]. The introduction of PAFs in 2001 allowed that. I wouldn't put that down as the sole reason for the growth in think tanks, but certainly, it's aided them quite a bit (interview, 2020).

Contributions to PAFs have increased dramatically since their creation. Indeed, McLeod estimates that cumulative PAF assets have ballooned to approximately ten billion dollars (interview, 2020). It is evident that the Howard-era reforms removed a conspicuous impediment to philanthropic giving in Australia and 'brought a whole lot more money into philanthropy' (interview with J. McLeod, 2020). In the process, think tanks gained access to funding avenues that were hitherto beyond reach.

There are assuredly other factors that impact the giving decisions of individuals and corporates. Nevertheless, the reform process has played a discernible role in the increase in philanthropic activity over the past two decades. McGregor-Lowndes et al. (2006, p. 506) suggest that 'the significant increase in affluent giving occurred upon the introduction of the PPF and property gift incentives, and some causality must be seriously considered.' Bakija (2013) presents evidence that tax incentives in the US positively impact the extent of philanthropic giving. In Australia, the founder and long-time Executive Director of the Centre for Independent Studies, Greg Lindsay, explicitly identifies the introduction of PAFs as a consequential moment for the CIS – an institute mature enough to discern the transformational effect of these initiatives on funding (interview, 2019).[91]

[91] Strikingly, the CIS is one of the very few entities explicitly *named* as a DGR-endorsed entity *within* the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*. The naming of CIS in *Section 30-40 (Research)* of the *Act* is highly unusual. Indeed, the Australian Tax Office refers to naming DGR-endorsed entities as 'exceptional' (ATO, 2017). The other think tanks explicitly named in the *Act* (only fourteen organisations are named in total) are the Menzies Research Centre, Chifley Research Centre, Page Research Centre, Green Institute, Grattan Institute, and the United States Studies Centre (Australian Government, 2020). But the CIS stands out as an openly ideological (arguably partisan), non-party-affiliated entity – and *government legislation* individually identifies it as qualifying for DGR status.

Chapter Four asserted that private funding is critical for the majority of think tanks. In this regard, Australia's tax reforms at the turn of the century and the increasing enthusiasm for philanthropic giving has improved think tank access to a growing pool of private funds. At a minimum, these circumstances have removed disincentives to the formation of these ideas-focussed, not-for-profit entities. The institutional impediments that Australian think tanks once encountered are no longer evident.

5.4 Comparative Development: An International Perspective

The Australian think tank industry has dramatically expanded over the past two decades, but it is yet to fully shake off the impression that it is insubstantial and on the periphery of political processes. Australia's modest think tank numbers – in comparison to other benchmark nations – keep these embers burning. In response, this section uses several metrics to evaluate the relative size and status of Australia's industry more systematically.

The high profile *Global Go-To Think Tank Index* (*GGTTI*) consistently presents tallies that support the idea that Australian think tanks remain 'small and relatively unimportant' (I. Marsh and Stone, 2004, p. 262). For instance, the 2019 *GGTTI* report positions Australia in equal *thirty-seventh* place on a ranking of think tank populations (with a declared forty-two think tanks). Australia's ranking is below (amongst others) Romania with fifty-four, Greece and Hungary with forty-six, and Peru with forty-three (but slightly above the Dominican Republic with forty) (McGann, 2020, pp. 41-44).

Within the so-called Anglosphere, Canada purportedly possesses one hundred think tanks, the United Kingdom has three-hundred-and-twenty-one, and the United States dominates with one-thousand-eight-hundred-and-seventy-one.[92] On this basis, the Australian think tank industry does indeed appear to remain 'small and unimportant'. But as Chapter Three explained, the *GGTTI* index appears to have significant flaws (even away from its questionable methodology) and presents a wholly incomplete and inaccurate picture of the Australian think tank industry. The present study identifies ninety-three Australian think tanks instead of the *GGTTI's* forty-two (even lower when adjusting for the apparent errors in the report). A tally of ninety-three institutes would instead place Australia in thirteenth position

[92] See Gulmanelli (2014, pp. 582-585) for a detailed discussion on the characteristics and constituents of the 'Anglosphere'.

on the *GGTTI* list (just above South Africa which purportedly possesses ninety-two think tanks).

It is possible to assess industry relativities by calculating a range of common-base metrics. In this way, think tank industry size can be more appropriately evaluated, rather than simply relying upon absolute numbers.[93] Raw think tank numbers need to be contextualised to be meaningful. A small country might have an abundance of think tanks and be heavily reliant on their ideational contributions, making them critical contributors to that country's political process. Yet the raw number of institutes might pale in comparison to the enormous numbers in the US (which is typically used to benchmark all other nations), suggesting that country's industry lacks significance. This thesis contends that reflexive comparisons to the US industry need to be supplemented with more descriptive data. Table 5.2 presents this study's attempt to provide industry context by calculating some comparative statistics across the Anglosphere (Appendix T details the data used to generate Table 5.2).[94]

Table 5-2: Think tank cross-country comparative metrics

	Australia	USA	UK	Canada
Number of think tanks	93	1871	321	100
Head of population per think tank ('000)	273	175	208	376
Government employees per think tank ('000)	23	12	17	39
GDP per think tank ($bn)	15	11	9	17

The comparative metrics contained in Table 5.2 might be crude, but they are nonetheless instructive. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Australian industry is not as well-developed as those in the US and the UK. But Australia's think tank growth rate (combined with base effects) suggests that this gap will continue to close. On the other hand, the Australian think tank industry surpasses the Canadian industry on all comparative measures (except raw count). The Canadian industry is ranked twelfth in the 2019 *GGTTI* report with one hundred think tanks – a number likely to accurately reflect its 'true' size given its comprehensive treatment by Canadian scholars (see Lindquist, 1989; Abelson, 1996, 2006, 2009, 2016).

[93] This analysis uses the present study's Australian think tank population – that is, ninety-three institutes. However, the analysis necessarily assumes that the *GGTTI* index accurately calculates the population counts for Canada, the UK, and the US. This assumption is credible given the regular scholarly scrutiny of these country's think tank industries.

[94] Data sourced from World Bank (2019b, 2019a), ABS (2021a), Duffin (2021), ONS (2020), and StatCan (2019).

There might be better measures to evaluate the relative size of national think tank industries, but the novel metrics proffered here provide some much-needed context away from the crudeness of absolute institute tallies. Of course, these measures say nothing about the relative influence of these entities. Nevertheless, they are invoked here to illustrate that it is no longer appropriate to characterise the Australian industry as a peripheral oligopoly. The competition of ideas is vigorous and expanding. The challenge for public policy institutes is to ensure their voice is heard in the cacophony.

5.5 Summary

This chapter demonstrates that the Australian think tank industry has thrown off its shackles over the past two decades. The chapter evidences escalating participation in the policy process and shows that the Australian industry remains in the growth stage of its life cycle. This evolution has occurred across discernible waves, each of which invites unique questions regarding the nature of think tank influence.

The chapter also asserts that the institutional constraints previously handicapping the development of the Australian industry no longer persist, thereby allowing a marketplace of ideas to flourish. In short, the chapter asserts that it is no longer appropriate to characterise the Australian think tank industry as 'small and unimportant'.

Chapters Four and Five establish the structure, characteristics and the current status of the Australian think tank industry. Chapter Six next examines some key questions surrounding think tank influence, including:

- Who do think tanks attempt to influence?
- When do they attempt to influence?

These questions anchor the analysis in Part Three of the thesis which explore in greater depth think tanks' most fundamental objectives.

Chapter Six: Influence Intentions

6.1 Introduction

This chapter shows that an overwhelming majority of Australian think tanks unambiguously seek to influence public policy. Individual institutes differentiated by size, typology and ideology consistently enunciate the same objective: to persuade public or elite opinion in the service of policy influence. There is nuance around the terminology used to describe these influence objectives, and some think tanks are more overt about their intentions than others. But there are relatively few who purely seek to 'inform' their audience.

This chapter broadly focuses on think tank organisational objectives and addresses several crucial questions. Section 6.2 first evidences think tank influence intentions and shows that they predominantly rely upon persuasive research to achieve those objectives. Section 6.3 then identifies think tanks' typical target audiences. It shows that many policy institutes primarily covet policymaker attention, although identifying any single audience greatly oversimplifies the complexity of the 'whom' question. Section 6.4 examines think tank policy cycle participation and the types of influence they seek to exert. While agenda-setting is prominent, many think tanks also distinguish the pursuit of policy outcomes and, as such, privilege policy formulation. This section additionally shows that those institutes participating across the breadth of the policy cycle are better-resourced than others.

A combination of survey and interview data inform the inferences in this chapter. Interview data particularly contextualise questions surrounding policy cycle participation and the nature of think tank influence. The data here help illuminate the variation in think tank processes and approaches and act as important inputs to the interrogation of think tank influence in Part Three of this thesis.

6.2 Think Tank Objectives

This study's central research question embeds an assumption: that think tanks actually *attempt* to influence. Some institutes do not. For example, the AIIA and the Sydney Institute provide a forum for discussion, eschewing attempts to influence, and instead seek to inform debates. Others, such as the Evatt Foundation, 'play in the traffic of ideas' and more modestly

seek to raise awareness of particular (social policy) issues (interview with Sheil, 2019). But these institutes are in the minority. The preoccupation of most think tanks centres on the deployment of intellectual and material resources to influence public policy.

Structural affiliations do not temper think tank aspirations. Ralph Lattimore, Executive Manager at the *government*-affiliated Productivity Commission, asserts 'there's no point in being academic and useless for policy. We want to be influential; so being pure and irrelevant is pretty stupid for us' (interview, 2019). Nick Cater, Executive Director at the *party*-affiliated Menzies Research Centre, similarly declares, 'if we don't influence government policy then we've failed; we're not just there to raise awareness' (interview, 2019). And Jen Jackson from the *university*-affiliated Mitchell Institute contends, 'if you didn't think you could have an influence, why would you be in the game?' (interview, 2019).

The survey data in Figure 6.1 illustrates the predominance of policy institutes influence-seeking objectives.[95] While the data is revealing, the response categories do not fully capture the breadth of think tank activity. The Executive Director of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), Michael Fotheringham, notes the absence of bureaucratic engagement and informal policy networks in the response categories (email communication with Fotheringham, 2019). Nevertheless, the response categories do allow for the distinction between those entities that do seek to influence policy and those that do not. For some, the 'parliamentary submissions' response category captures their entity's engagement with government departments and public sector agencies. For instance, the Executive Director of Per Capita, Emma Dawson, advises that 'one of the major ways we engage [with the public service] is through submissions to parliamentary inquiries' (interview, 2019b).

[95] The survey question here invited respondents to select up to two statements to describe their entity's objectives. The seventy-one survey participants submitted a total of one-hundred and twenty-six responses, indicating that some respondents selected only one response option.

Figure 6-1: Think tank influence efforts (by number of institutes)

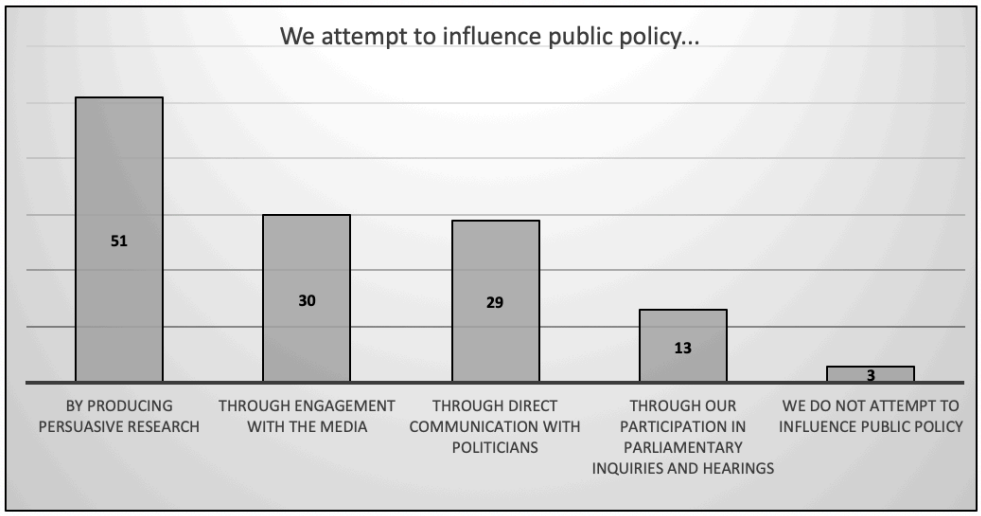


Figure 6.1 also evidences the degree to which policy institutes directly engage with elite stakeholders. Think tank scholars do not produce research to simply advance knowledge. Their ideas are instead designed to have practical application and to influence policymaker thinking on policy issues. These ideas must first gain attention if they are to facilitate the entity's influence objectives. Institutes need to make their ideas visible and accessible through public channels (via media engagement) or private channels (by directly engaging policymakers), or both. Andrew Rich (2004, pp. 206-207) previously identified think tank marketing efforts as key determinants of successful policy influence in the US setting. In Australia, policy institutes target their marketing efforts towards a variety of actors, including elected officials (both federal and state), the public service, the media, the business community, unions, the academic community, and the public (both general and informed). The express objective of these marketing efforts is to sway or persuade a targeted audience's opinions and understandings of a public policy issue.

To a large extent, the operationalisation of think tank objectives depends on financial resources. While it is the case that almost all think tanks seek to influence public policy, decisions regarding how they attempt to exert that influence substantially depend upon financial circumstances. Survey data shows that fewer resources necessitate a narrower focus. Only 58 per cent of institutes with an annual expense budget of less than one million dollars state that they attempt to influence public policy by producing persuasive research. This compares to 88 per cent of institutes with an annual expense budget of over one million dollars. Employing skilled scholars to produce penetrating research is an expensive business.

As such, institutes with a budget of fewer than one million dollars are more likely (than institutes with larger budgets) to rely upon direct media and politician engagement when endeavouring to influence public policy (49 per cent versus 39 per cent). Policy work for many of these less-endowed entities aligns with Leech's 'service bureau' concept, where they focus on 'providing information, mobilizing publics, [and] attracting media attention' (2010, p. 717).

Halpin notes that 'group resource levels is not in and of itself sufficient to indicate value to policy makers' (Halpin, 2014, p. 180). He asserts that the 'capacity to influence' is more than just a resources question – it is what think tanks do with their resources that generates influence. Key strategic decisions ultimately determine think tank success. These key decisions include the targets of think tank influence, the type of influence they seek, and the methods they employ to exert influence (Chapter Seven examines the question of 'how?'). Thereafter, think tanks need to build specific capabilities that concord with these strategic decisions.

6.3 Think Tank Target Audiences

Target audience determination is a critical strategic decision that shapes the content and format of think tank outputs. It is therefore no surprise that most think tank executives can identify their institute's target audience without hesitation. In this study, interview participants most commonly identify policymakers as their central targets. But this was rarely to the exclusion of other constituencies. For example, the Executive Director of ASPI, Peter Jennings, points to a hierarchy of audiences, stating 'first and foremost, it's members of parliament, and inside that group, ministers. […] At the next level out, it's the senior leadership of the public service' (interview, 2019). ASPI's targeting of elected and bureaucratic elites is unsurprising given the institute's national-security focus. Luke Malpass, the Political Editor of *Stuff*, quips that ASPI is 'essentially the Department of Defense Research Institute' (interview, 2020). But Jennings goes on to identify the media, the diplomatic community, the defence industry, and, finally, the general public as relevant target audiences. To be sure, ASPI is one of few institutes capable of pursuing such a diverse range of audiences. ASPI's supply of material resources allows it to pursue influence in three distinct political arenas – the media,

the bureaucracy and the parliament – whereas many other institutes necessarily concentrate in only one of these arenas (Binderkrantz et al., 2015).[96]

Other large institutes are similarly broad-ranging. The Executive Director of the Grattan Institute, John Daley, details his institute's approach:

> We talk to ministers, we talk to ministers' staff, we talk to oppositions, we talk to cross-benchers, […] we talk to people in departments, we talk to people in agencies, we talk to people in state governments (interview, 2019).[97]

In short, Daley identifies 'decision makers and people who influence decision makers – our deliberate strategy is to go after them all.' That includes the general public. Daley declares, 'when you change the hearts and minds of the public, then the hearts and minds of our politicians tend to follow very shortly thereafter' (interview, 2019).

The Executive Director of the IPA, John Roskam, provides a nuanced response, submitting that the IPA's target audience pivots on the policy issue in question. Roskam specifically identifies a list of individual targets based on the IPA's varied research foci:

> So, to take our red-tape work, it's bureaucrats and a limited number of politicians. We want to explain to the Australian public what we are doing, but the methodology of our research and our findings are directed to key policymakers. On our research on the importance of free speech at our universities; it's directed toward university administrators, university students and parents and grandparents. Our research on climate change will be directed to the public and to business owners, for example. We will do highly academic research on legal rights, for example, that will be directed towards legal academics. We do a lot of submissions to public and parliamentary inquiries – sometimes we will do a submission and it will only be directed toward the eight members of parliament who are on the committee. So, it varies a lot according to what the issue is (interview with Roskam, 2019).

By propagating their preferences in multiple arenas, these large institutes have extended their policy engagement beyond mere 'involvement'– they covet, and have achieved 'prominence' (Halpin and Fraussen, 2017). Grattan, ASPI and the IPA are all 'taken-for-granted' as authoritative voices in their chosen fields substantially due to their capacity to broadly promote their policy ideas (Halpin and Fraussen, 2017).

Modestly endowed entities are no less sophisticated in their approach, despite possessing fewer resources to pursue multiple audiences. Most recognise that think tank

[96] Binderkrantz et al. (2015, p. 95) define a political arena as 'a political institution of importance for political decisions and/or the political agenda of a society.'

[97] John Daley retired from his role as the Grattan Institute Executive Director in June 2020.

success depends on strategic clarity around organisational objectives, regardless of institute size. Interview data demonstrate the deliberate approaches of less-prominent institutes. The Executive Director of Beyond Zero Emissions, Vanessa Petrie, categorically identifies BZE's influence targets: 'Decision-makers. Government's that can set policy […] and businesses that can deploy solutions' (interview, 2019).[98] Similarly, Eamon Waterford, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the Committee for Sydney, asserts that his 'number one audience is government decision-makers […] our secondary audience is our member base and using them as a conduit to decision-makers' (interview, 2019). Jen Jackson, Education Policy Lead at the Mitchell Institute, targets 'primarily policymakers […], but we are conscious of a broader public audience as well' (interview, 2019). Likewise, Iain Walker, Executive Director of newDemocracy, pursues 'people in elected office – it's our number one audience' (interview, 2019). Rory Medcalf's National Security College looks to engage 'a minister or a chief of staff, or a senior advisor to a minister, or a secretary of a department […] as high as possible' (interview with Medcalf, 2019). These testimonies catalogue a small sample of accordant pronouncements and illustrate think tanks' unwavering focus on affecting policy change.

Policymakers are the primary target for many think tanks, but others instead seek to mobilise public opinion. This indirect approach to policy influence is well-founded. It is consistent with the theory of majoritarian electoral democracy, whereby government policy responds 'to the collective will of average citizens' (see Gilens and Page, 2014, p. 565). Aaron Martin et al. (2014, p. 516) find 'that the [Australian federal] government acts on the issues deemed most salient by the public' and assert that there is a 'strong link' between public opinion and policy (following Page and Shapiro, 1983, pp. 188-189).[99] The Executive Director of Per Capita, Emma Dawson, acts in accordance and testifies to an unambiguous focus on 'the Australian people' when trying to influence policy debates (interview, 2019b). The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) has historically adopted a similarly public-oriented approach (interview with Lindsay, 2019). In these cases, public opinion is a conduit to policy action. Adrian Dwyer, CEO of Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, puts it bluntly, stating 'my only interest in traditional media and talking directly to the public is to influence decision-makers – we don't want a brand recognition score' (interview, 2019).

[98] Vanessa Petrie left Beyond Zero Emissions in March 2020.
[99] See also A. Campbell and Rigby (2016) for further evidence on the opinion-policy link.

Public audience engagement is a means-to-an-end for think tanks. In this way, institutes seek to indirectly influence policy decisions by persuading public perspectives. And if the public is the influence target, then the concept of framing becomes important. Binderkrantz (2020) proposes a model that analyses the framing of interest group preferences in policy debates. Three of her four framing categories substantially capture think tank activities. Using the above exemplars, Per Capita generally adopts an 'other-regarding frame' (where the institute seeks to bring attention to people exposed to social injustices), the CIS gravitates toward 'public-regarding frames' (where the institute focuses on the desirability of individual freedoms and the societal consequences of certain policy measures), and Infrastructure Partnerships Australia focuses on 'economy-regarding frames' (where the institute frames the benefits of social and economic infrastructure). These framing categories reflect the philosophical disposition of each institute and, accordingly, the policy issues they pursue. Binderkrantz's framework demonstrates that efforts to indirectly influence public policy are multi-layered. It is right to first differentiate think tank strategies based on (direct) policymaker engagement and (indirect) public mobilisation efforts. But there is sub-level variation in indirect influence approaches that depend on the policy issue itself and the nature of the targeted public.

Survey and interview data show that Australian think tanks primarily target policymakers and the public. But institutes routinely stretch their efforts-to-influence beyond these core targets. The founder of the Centre for Independent Studies (and current Board member), Greg Lindsay, points to his institute's efforts to place CIS-authored books on the reading lists of university courses through direct engagement with university scholars.[100] Uniquely, Lindsay also highlights the CIS's efforts to engage religious groups. Lindsay states,

> It was very strategic – there's an important group of people who are church people, who [other] people will listen to. And if they're telling stories that we think are wrong, then we will try to help them with a better way of thinking (interview, 2019).

Think tanks also target the business community, but not as commonly as one might expect. Both the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) and the United States Studies Centre (in addition to BZE and the Committee for Sydney, as noted) specifically

[100] The CIS has moved away from the production of book-length studies in more recent times and no longer persists with such efforts.

distinguish commercial entities as key target audiences (interviews with Ball, 2019; Jackman, 2019). But few others do. This modest focus on the business community might alternatively reflect the issue-foci of think tanks, incumbent lobbyist representation of business interests, or business community reluctance to involve itself in potentially partisan policy issues. Binderkrantz et al. (2014, pp. 880-881) highlight the motivational differences between 'sectional' groups (including business groups) and 'cause' groups (such as think tanks). Following Binderkrantz et al., the paucity of think tanks' business community engagement is likely to reflect the business community's narrower sectional interests and their cautious receptiveness to think tank policy causes.

'Think-and-do-tanks' are an important subset of the policy institute fraternity. These institutes combine traditional think tank activities with hands-on civil society engagement, bypassing traditional political processes by actively implementing internally-developed policy solutions. Their provision of intellectual goods advances their institute's strategic or ideological objectives, and at the same time, produces tangible outcomes for their targeted audience.

Several organisations in this study stand out for their 'do-tank' activities. For example, the Centre for Policy Development develops outcome-oriented programmes to improve real-world conditions for specifically targeted societal groups. Beyond Zero Emissions is similarly action-oriented and collaborates with the business community to directly implement its innovative climate solutions (Appendix L discusses the demonstrably causal impacts of these two institutes). Other institutes such as newDemocracy and Per Capita use collaborative processes to reach deep into the community to strengthen their policy ideation, drawing on others to assist in developing and implementing of their proposals.

Institutes including the National Security College (NSC), ASPI and the Regional Australia Institute seek to deepen their engagement with specific audiences through industry capacity-building programs. Both ASPI and the NSC run professional development courses for strategic and national security professionals, while the Regional Australia Institute runs leadership programs that focus on regional community economic development and the elevation of regional business capabilities (interviews with Houghton, 2019; P. Jennings, 2019; Medcalf, 2019). In sum, these 'think-and-do-tanks' demonstrate the complexities surrounding the 'who' question, and they illustrate the varied approaches institutes take to achieve their influence objectives.

Policy institute target audience is a critical strategic decision. This section has shown that enlightened think tank executives think deliberately about their targets, understanding that the production of policy ideas is only the first step in exerting influence. Ensuring the content is directed toward the most relevant audience is equally important. Chapter Seven further examines decisions pertaining to content style, packaging and delivery, all of which are conditional upon antecedent target audience decisions.

6.4 Policy Cycle Engagement

Think tanks generate ideas, promote philosophical perspectives and pursue policy initiatives. The stage at which they insert themselves into the policy process depends on whether they seek to persuade the broader policy environment or more directly impact policy outcomes. These decisions have a natural overlap with target audience decisions. For example, think tanks that target a public audience generally seek to influence the broader policy environment. In this regard, some think tank scholars have used the policy cycle framework to aid their interpretations of think tank influence (see, for example, Rich, 1999; Abelson, 2009). This section adopts a similar approach and uses the policy cycle framework to assess the extent to which think tanks attempt to influence early or late-stage policy processes. The section shows that Australian think tanks have an acute awareness of policy cycle participation and, as such, the type of influence they seek. Some readily identify their strategic engagement at various points in the cycle, while others reject the amorphous partitioning of the policy process and see themselves as active throughout the lifespan of a policy issue.

This thesis' original survey probed think tanks policy cycle participation. The survey asked think tank executives, journalists and federal parliamentarians where in the policy cycle think tanks can be most effective. These questions are important because they provide insights into the kinds of influence think tanks might exert. That is, do think tanks try to identify issues, set agendas and influence policy debates? Or do they proffer specific policy measures and attempt to impact policy formulation more directly?

Figure 6.2 includes responses from all three participating survey groups and illustrates a broadly held belief that think tanks *can be* most effective at the agenda-setting stage.[101]

[101] The survey question here asked think tank respondents to identify the policy cycle stage where they could 'most effectively' influence public policy. The corresponding question asked parliamentarians and journalists to identify the policy cycle stage where think tanks could have the 'greatest impact' on public policy.

Interestingly, cross-tabulations of think tank respondent data reveal no discernible patterns or relationships with other variables. Aggregate think tank results are consistent across orientation, expense budgets, number of researchers, and year founded.

Figure 6-2: Policy cycle effectiveness (by percentage of population)

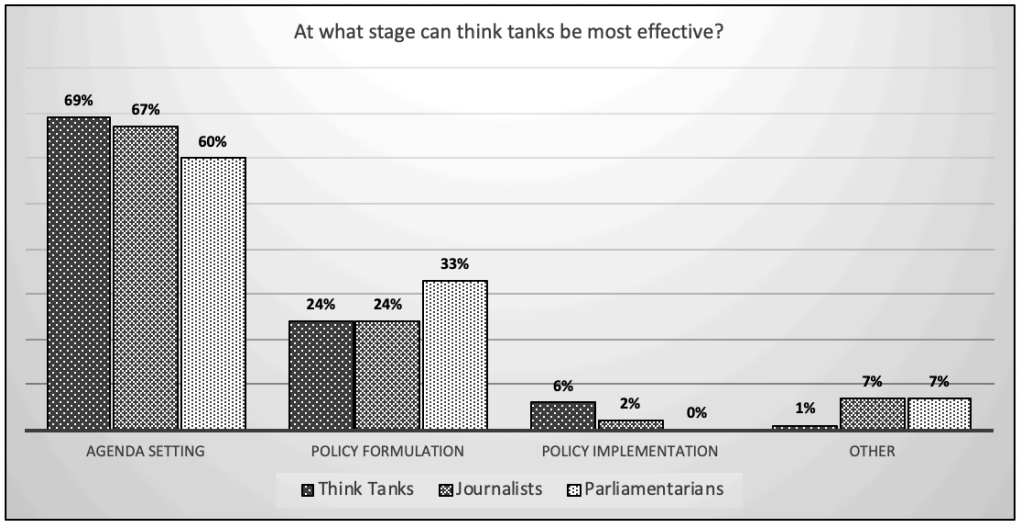


Figure 6.2 shows that the think tank survey results are substantially consistent with the data from the corresponding journalist survey. However, parliamentarians diverge. They identify '*agenda setting*' less and '*policy formulation*' more than the other two respondent groups. Parliamentarians elevate '*policy formulation'*, indicating an appreciation of think tank contributions to the policy development process. This important finding also suggests that government funding for think tanks is likely to retain support – in aggregate – given one-third of federal parliamentarian respondents believe think tanks can make consequential contributions to policy formulation.

At the same time, the subordination of 'policy implementation' across all three respondent groups is surprising. The results here suggest that think tanks disengage at the implementation stage of the process, or otherwise have a limited impact on the application of government policy. This finding is somewhat contrary to the prior discussion on the effectiveness and impact of so-call 'think-and-do-tanks'. These 'do-tanks' are expressly in the business of policy implementation. But there are only a small number of these 'hands-on' institutes in the population, and the 6 per cent think tank response rate to this survey option is likely an accurate reflection of their prevalence. It also seems that their efforts go largely unnoticed by political and media elites.

The predominance of agenda-setting meets expectations. Grossmann (2012, pp. 88-89) asserts that entity 'prominence' is a necessary antecedent to 'major policy influence' – or an antecedent to influencing policy formulation from a policy cycle perspective. As Chapter Four explained, only a small number of think tanks achieve 'prominence' within elite circles (see Grossmann, 2012; Halpin and Fraussen, 2017). In the present study, think tank *survey* respondents that selected '*policy formulation'* and '*policy implementation'* in Figure 6.2 necessarily signal that they can directly influence policy outcomes (or they would have instead selected 'agenda setting'). So, if there are relatively few institutes that directly impact policy outcomes (as Grossmann, 2012 suggests), it follows that there should be far fewer survey respondents selecting '*policy formulation'* and '*policy implementation'* than those selecting '*agenda setting'*. In short, the data presented in Figure 6.2 are consistent with these theoretical propositions – agenda-setting should and does predominate.

The reasons for the predominance of agenda-setting are varied, although some stand out more than others. Producing policy specific research designed to directly impact policy formulation requires great skill. It requires deep knowledge of the political context and environment, intimate knowledge of policy requirements and options, and the ability to conduct sophisticated analysis across several disciplines. Detailed policy prescriptions are less likely to capture the public's imagination (witness the policy light platforms of Australia's major political parties when electioneering), and think tanks therefore risk misspending valuable resources should policymakers dismiss these prescriptions. The Director of Research at the Lowy Institute, Alex Oliver, emphasises these points: 'coming up with explicit policy ideas and prescriptions is another matter altogether, [it is] very difficult. And it's not for lack of wanting to produce that sort of policy work – but finding people to write that' is very challenging (interview, 2019). For many institutes, exerting late-cycle policy influence in this way is implausible. It requires enduring investments in specific policy capacities that are simply beyond the reach of most institutes. On the other hand, early-cycle activities (defining issues and setting agendas) are, on many occasions, less specific and more thematic, making them a more realistic pursuit for a broad range of institutes.

Triangulating survey data with original interview data provides a more complete picture of policy cycle participation. Survey data suggests that think tanks can be most effective when setting agendas or, in another way, when targeting the broader policy environment. Peschek (1987) previously extolled think tanks' agenda-setting abilities, fostering philosophical shifts

in the broad social, political and economic environments. Such inferences are valid here, but incomplete. Think tanks suggest (and journalists and parliamentarians agree) that they can be most effective when engaging in environment-shaping activities. But interview responses also indicate that outcome-oriented activities are pervasive.

Some think tank executives emphatically identify their late-cycle approaches. The Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Development (CPD), Travers McLeod, asserts that CPD 'definitely [pursues] outcomes.' As a self-declared 'think-and-do-tank', CPD directly engages in policy formulation and the implementation of its internally designed programs (interview, 2019). Policy institute veteran Des Moore agrees: 'policy outcomes – definitely' (interview, 2019).[102] Centre for Independent Studies scholar, Jeremy Sammut, urges right-leaning think tanks to focus their efforts later in the policy cycle and be 'more focussed on outcomes, on implementation, on having real impacts' (interview, 2019).[103]

Other think tank executives introduce layers of subtlety. Katie McRobert from the Australian Farm Institute (AFI) is nuanced in her submissions, stating that the AFI is 'responsive to the environment and hope to influence outcomes' (interview, 2019). The Chief Economist of the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, Jarrod Ball, asserts that CEDA's *Community Pulse* survey is an environment shaping device, 'giving [the public] a sense of what's important'.[104] At the same time, Ball highlights CEDA's comprehensive policy-focussed reports (such as '*Effects of Temporary Migration'*), which aim to achieve 'clear policy outcomes' (interview, 2019; CEDA, 2019b).

Some think tank executives challenge the veracity of the stages model – even as an organising framework. The co-CEO of the Regional Australia Institute (RAI), Kim Houghton, uses a snakes-and-ladders analogy to describe his conceptualisation of the policy process, suggesting that the stages model does not adequately capture the iterative nature of RAI's work. Michael Fotheringham of AHURI and Jen Jackson from the Mitchell Institute both agree. Jackson dismisses the notion of a sequential cycle: 'that's nonsense, the linear thing' (interview, 2019). Their views accord with the assertions of scholar Peter John (2012, pp. 19-

[102] Des Moore previously worked at the Institute of Public Affairs. He established the Institute for Private Enterprise in 1996 and was its Executive Director until he passed away on November 1, 2020 (Moore, 2021).
[103] Andrew Rich (2004, p. 26) contends that more-recently established (mostly ideological) think tanks in the US privilege late-cycle activities. But he also suggests that these efforts are largely inconsequential because 'sides have already been established and minds have largely been made up.'
[104] CEDA's *Community Pulse* examines 'community attitudes to growth and development' (CEDA, 2021b).

23), who vigorously rejects the validity of the stages model. The Mitchell Institute's Jen Jackson adds:

> We try to ensure that our recommendations point to good implementation as well as promoting the big idea. A lot of think tanks stop with the policy idea. It's actually through implementation that the government is going to make a difference. The big idea itself isn't going to change a thing – it's how you do it (interview, 2019).

Nevertheless, for many think tanks the 'big idea' is the big thing. Defining issues and setting agendas through policy ideation is an end in itself – particularly for ideas that champion profound policy change. In such cases, think tanks seek to broaden the so-called 'Overton window' – the 'politically acceptable range of policy options at any given moment' (Drezner, 2017, p. 130). For instance, the right-leaning Institute of Public Affairs frequently challenges the boundaries of what might be considered *politically* acceptable policy proposals. The proposed privatisation of Australia's publicly-funded broadcaster, the ABC, stands as a benchmark example (IPA, 2016; Mulholland, 2021). But the IPA is also clear-eyed when it comes to the support for such ideas. The Executive Director of the IPA, John Roskam, asserts that 'influence is usually measured over decades.' Roskam likens the potency of agenda-setting ideas to 'water dripping on a rock – it might have no impact for years until, eventually, the rock splits in half because the water has worn it away' (interview, 2019).

Persuading the policy environment requires persistence and patience. Although think tank influence at these earlier, environment-shaping stages of the policy cycle is often difficult to discern, one should not doubt their effectiveness. Chong and Druckman (2007) spotlight the responsiveness of public opinion to issue framing and show that nurturing dominant narratives sow the seeds of future policy change. Think tanks fertilise the ground with policy ideas and hope they will blossom and ultimately bear fruit. But many think tanks also focus on policy formulation and implementation to impact policy outcomes more directly.

This section once again demonstrates the diversity in think tank approaches and the different ways in which policy institutes seek to exert influence. As Halpin (2014, p. 182) suggests, 'each policy problem or challenge requires a different set of capabilities to make groups relevant to policy makers.' Many think tanks demonstrate this strategic flexibility and carefully develop coherent programs that leverage their institutional strengths.

6.5 Summary

This chapter primarily examines think tank strategy. It shows that think tanks clearly covet policy influence, but key strategic decisions determine the manifestation of that influence. Successful think tank executives carefully consider their target audiences and deliberately participate at varying stages of the policy process. They are purposive and systematic, recognising that policy influence is less likely with confused or ambiguous approaches. Most possess a clear answer to the questions of 'who?' and 'when?', but certainly not all: 'Right. I guess on one level, I have to confess, that I don't really know' (Anonymous Interviewee S, 2019).[105]

To a significant degree, an entity's financial circumstances drive strategic decisions. Larger institutes primarily attempt to influence public policy by producing persuasive research and participating in multiple political arenas. But despite also privileging policy ideation, smaller institutes more often identify the importance of media engagement and political access (than larger institutes) in their policy influence attempts. Regardless, most institutes – whether large or small – believe they can be most effective at the agenda-setting stage of the policy process.

Part Three of this thesis empirically examines think tank influence claims and extensively draws upon this Chapter's analysis. The 'who?' and 'when?' questions are critical when assessing the manifestation of influence. Such questions naturally invite the consideration of the other actors engaged on a policy issue and the reasonableness of think tank claims that they played a consequential role in the issue's evolution (consistent with the Shiffman and Smith analytical framework).

Having determined their influence targets and the type of influence they seek to exert, think tanks next need to select the most suitable methods to advance their ideas. How think tanks exert influence is an equally critical input into influence assessment. Chapter Seven extensively assesses the various methods think tanks adopt.

[105] This interviewee agreed to identification in this thesis, but this quote is anonymised to ensure no reputational impact.

Chapter Seven: Influence Methods

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the methods think tanks employ to promulgate their ideas. Think tanks express their ideas in many ways, but the packaging and conveyance of these ideas are critical choices that substantially impact think tank success.

Method choices naturally relate to institutes' decisions on the type of influence they seek (for example, agenda-setting or policy formulation) and their influence targets. The chapter demonstrates that think tanks purposively package their ideas to ensure they are accessible and valued by the recipients. Section 7.2 uses survey and interview data to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of think tank marketing efforts. This section also shows that elite audiences hold contrasting views regarding the value and utility of think tank outputs. Section 7.3 then examines the centrality of research and the complexity of research format decisions.

Think tanks' direct engagement efforts are a particular focus in this chapter. Section 7.4 first analyses the purpose and style of think tank member and supporter events. Section 7.5 then examines think tanks' direct political engagement efforts. Both sections show that think tank policy ideation and report writing are only the first steps in the quest for influence. Most think tanks actively proselytise their ideas, and many do so by personally engaging their targeted audience. Much of the think tank literature treats the *nature* of this engagement as subordinate to the *extent* of the engagement. This chapter analyses think tank methods by considering both the nature and the extent of these engagement efforts. Finally, Section 7.6 builds upon the analysis in Chapter Five (Evolution) and examines think tanks' embrace of new media. It shows that left- and right-leaning institutes diverge in their adoption of new media, but most recognise the importance of strategically targeting an identified audience.

This chapter channels the concept of policy capacity throughout. The quantum of financial resources is a pivotal determinant of methods, but the application of those resources has the greatest bearing on institute effectiveness.

7.2 Idea Propagation

David Truman (1967, p. 213) once observed that 'almost invariably, one of the first results of the formal organization of an interest group is its embarking upon a program of propaganda, though rarely so labelled, designed to affect opinions concerning the interests and claims of the new group.' The institutes in the present study will reject the term 'propaganda' as an appropriate descriptor of their activities. But Truman's point is well made. Almost all think tanks seek to influence public policy, and the active marketing of ideas is a core part of the role.

Think tank policy ideas are worth little if they do not reach their targeted audience. R. Kent Weaver (1989) and David Ricci (1993) earlier identified the developing significance of think tank marketing in the US, and Andrew Rich (1999) extensively documented its impact on policy deliberations. These US circumstances encourage similar expectations in Australia given the comparable development paths of the respective industries. The present study finds that most Australian policy institutes thoughtfully promote their content and are deeply aware of the importance of effective marketing. Strikingly, 37 per cent of think tank survey respondents '*strongly agree'* that the effective marketing of policy ideas is *at least* as important as the quality of the ideas (a further 40 per cent '*agree'*).[106] Figures 7.1 and 7.2 illustrate the extent to which think tanks directly communicate with and distribute research to elite audiences.[107]

[106] Only 12 per cent of respondents '*disagree'*, while 11 per cent of respondents '*neither agree nor disagree'*.
[107] The survey question here states that '*direct communication means engaging in conversation with a think tank representative (in any role) over the phone, in person, or electronically*'.

Figure 7-1: Think tank research distribution (by percentage of respondents)

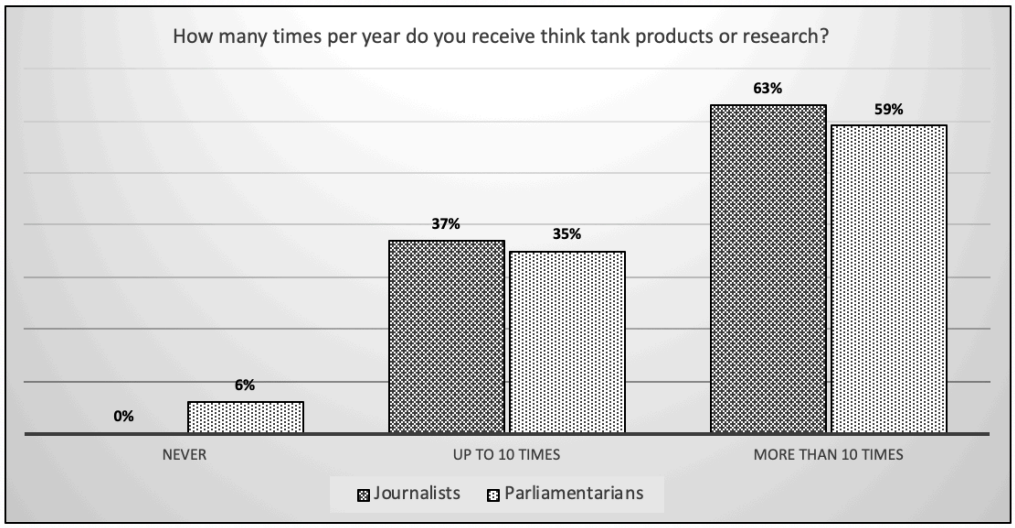
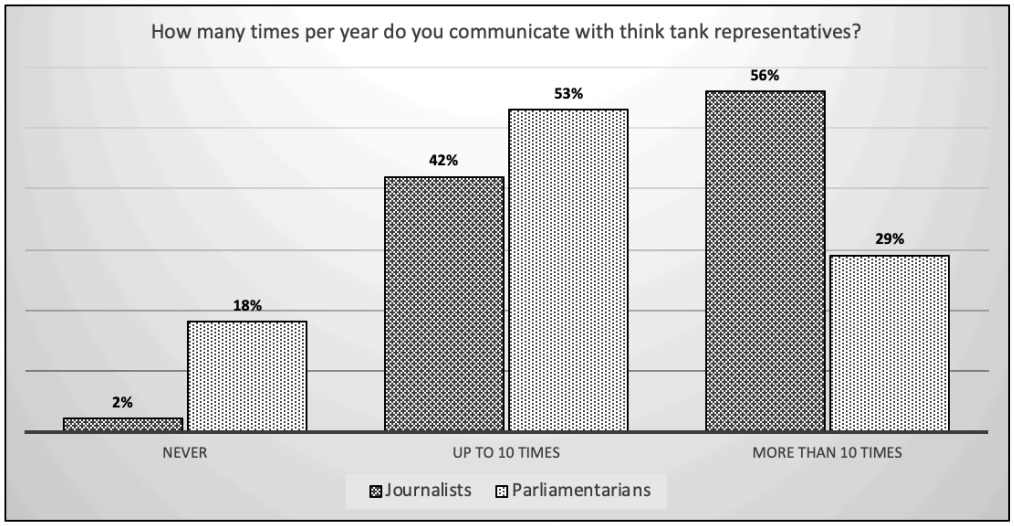


Figure 7-2: Think tank communication (by percentage of respondents)



The charts indicate that think tanks successfully diffuse their messages. But to what end? What are the implications of this successful penetration? Is the content distributed beyond the immediate recipient? Survey data reveals that 30 per cent of parliamentarian respondents '*frequently*' reference think tank research in internal policy discussions. A further 58 per cent '*occasionally*' do the same. However, cross-tabulations show that the data diverge on party affiliation. Thirty-two per cent of Labor Party respondents state that their internal policy discussions '*frequently*' reference think tank research. Only 9 per cent of Coalition respondents state the same. Scarcely 4 per cent of Labor Party respondents state that they '*rarely*' reference think tank research in internal policy discussions, compared to 36 per cent

for Coalition respondents.[108] Interview data further demonstrate the divergent views regarding think tank relevance to party policy discussions:

> *Labor Party respondent*: Yes. It's not a dominant feature of how we talk about things, but it is definitely relevant. It is something that Labor people – parliamentarians and others – will draw to one another's attention (Anonymous Interviewee M, 2020).

> *Coalition respondent*: No – not at all – they play no role at all […] in terms of our internal policy discussions, they play no role – none whatsoever that I can recall (Anonymous Interviewee N, 2020).

The results might reflect divergent views on the utility of expertise. Head and Banerjee (2020) suggest that hyper-partisanship and the rise of populism have impacted the demand for expert advice. The authors assert that 'value-based assertions will remain central' to debates about policy and that a 'more comprehensive technical knowledge cannot be effective as the primary means to persuade people on matters shaped by difference in substantive values' (p. 118). With a heightened awareness of these trends, some think tanks elevate the projection of values alongside the production of research in pursuit of their preferences. As such, it would be inaccurate to suggest that all think tanks conduct objective research and develop policy prescriptions based on that research. Values-inspired outputs are central to some think tanks' ideational processes, and impact the perceived utility of think tank offerings.

The present thesis does not argue that the Coalition is any more partisan (or populist) than the ALP, but it is the case that right-leaning think tanks are more inclined to privilege values when advancing policy initiatives. The Executive Director of the right-leaning IPA, John Roskam, makes the point:

> Values now trump evidence. Policy is following politics as being values-driven […]. A trade union member is almost just as likely to vote for Liberal as Labor – that reflects that labels don't matter; pragmatism matters less – it's values. […] We also have evidence and data and research, but it is explicitly grounded in values and a belief system and a clear enunciation of our subjective approach […] We are a very values-driven organisation (interview, 2019).

[108] The *p*-value equals 0.0208.

Interviews with ideologically opposed parliamentarians unambiguously validate Roskam's point (consistent with Fielding et al., 2012; Head, 2015). One right-leaning parliamentarian opines at length:

> The critical difference between the centre-right and the centre-left today is that the centre-right is still a political movement anchored in values, which ultimately then gets translated into a policy. Because the centre-left basically lost the argument about centralising power […] they've become technocrats. So, they need evidence to justify their arguments because they're not very good at arguing from a position of values, and what they believe in. So, they need data to justify their arguments. […] Whereas what we have is values which connect to people's lives […]. One of the other great lies in the modern age is that we should have evidence-based policy. We shouldn't have evidence-based policy. We should have values-based policy (Anonymous Interviewee K, 2020).

A left-leaning parliamentarian counters:

> I'm pro-evidence base and certainly my party is. I think if you want to call yourself a think tank, you should actually be a think tank. [Policy] should be evidence-based (Anonymous Interviewee L, 2020).

But the variation in think tank penetration (in political party discussions) might also reflect the disparate demands on the government versus the opposition.[109] Journalist (and former think-tanker) Luke Malpass advocates this point: 'it's almost an unbreakable rule that [think tanks] will have quite a lot of influence in opposition, and you will have very little in government' (interview, 2020). The party of government (presently the Coalition) demonstrably possesses a more extensive policymaking infrastructure than the opposition (presently the ALP). The governing party also has a greater focus on policy implementation, whereas the opposition's focus is on policy deliberation and development. Interview content supports these points. Parliamentarians across the political spectrum identify resource relativities as crucial variables impacting think tank relevance to party policy deliberations (Anonymous Interviewee I, 2020; Anonymous Interviewee J, 2020; Anonymous Interviewee K, 2020; Anonymous Interviewee L, 2020).

Think tank penetration is also crucially dependent upon perceptions of institute credibility (see, for example, Lindquist, 1989, p. 252; Rich, 1999, p. 19). That is, an institute's ideas are more likely to garner party-room attention if the originator is considered an authoritative and reliable contributor. Survey data again shows that parliamentarians divide

[109] The Liberal/National Coalition was re-elected to government in the federal election on May 18, 2019.

along ideological lines. Thirty per cent of Coalition respondents '*disagree'* with the statement that think tanks '*can be regarded as credible sources of information*.' No Labor Party participants (or crossbenchers) respond in the same manner.[110] Further, only 50 per cent of Coalition respondents either '*strongly agree'* (17 per cent) or '*agree'* (33 per cent) that they find think tank research useful when deliberating over policy (50 per cent '*neither agree nor disagree'*). On the other hand, 96 per cent of ALP participants (and 100 per cent of crossbenchers) respond positively.[111] In sum, the data suggest that Labor Party respondents (and crossbenchers) see think tanks as important contributors to policy development. Coalition respondents do not appear to share the same enthusiasm.[112]

These inferences are curious. The two dominant centre-right think tanks – the CIS and the IPA – are well-resourced and consistently tender policy-relevant proposals. They are publicly and privately active and nurture prominent media profiles. But if these are the think tanks that right-leaning parliamentarians imagined when responding to this study's open-ended survey question (and the data suggest that is the case), why are their contributions seemingly dismissed? Are their ideas sufficiently policy-relevant? And are their outputs of sufficient quality to warrant party consideration? Part Three of the present thesis specifically examines the CIS's influence on a particular policy issue, but these tangential questions are otherwise left for future research.

The inferences here also run counter to studies that point to a symbiotic relationship between right-leaning think tanks and the Coalition (see, for example, M. Smith and Marden, 2008; Lingard, 2015; Farrelly, 2016; Kelly, 2017). The present study instead finds that the relationship between the Coalition and right-leaning think tanks is not as black-and-white as some assert. The Director of Research at the IPA, Daniel Wild, provides a range of examples where the IPA directly confronts Coalition policy and contends that the IPA is 'driven by principles and not party politics' (email correspondence, 2020). Certainly, there is no question that the IPA's philosophical drivers align with Australia's right-leaning political parties. But it

[110] The *p*-value equals 0.0786.
[111] The *p*-value equals 0.0048.
[112] The inferences are cautious here. Notwithstanding the statistical significance of the findings, the non-response rate of Coalition parliamentarians is higher than Labor Party parliamentarians, potentially impacting the validity of the results.

is also straightforward to locate occasions where the IPA challenges or repudiates Coalition policy.[113]

Regardless, the triangulated data in this section reveals an imbalanced receptiveness to think tank offerings. Head et al. (2014) provide reasons why some policymakers embrace the utility of external research while others spurn its use. Similarly, Fielding et al. (2012) demonstrate that ideology matters when assessing the application of research to public policy problems. Chapter Twelve leverages this scholarship and draws further inferences in this regard.

7.3 The Centrality of Research

Most think tanks use policy research and analysis to engage policymakers and mobilise journalists. Accordingly, policy institutes pay careful attention to both the content and the structure of their research reports. The think tank value proposition hinges on the notion of expertise and, as such, institutes need to demonstrate advanced competencies to attract receptive audiences. But the packaging of their intellectual contributions also matters. Time-challenged parliamentarians – and their staffers – rarely have the bandwidth to patiently forge through 'thick' research reports. On the other hand, brief reports may not adequately demonstrate the necessary subject mastery. The attention afforded short-form content largely depends on the credibility of the author and institute.

The publication of comprehensive, penetrating research burnishes think tank credibility. And establishing a reputation for sophisticated outputs enables the retention of credibility when producing shorter policy briefs. The Lowy Institute's approach demonstrates this point. Lowy's early emphasis was on producing long-form research reports (so-called *Lowy Institute Papers),* which established it as an astute observer of international affairs. But the institute later abandoned these 'thick' reports in favour of shorter research notes and policy briefs – a move that posed few issues for Lowy, with their target audiences welcoming the more focussed content (interview with A. Oliver, 2019).[114]

[113] For example, the IPA scolds the Coalition for introducing the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018 (Begg, 2019), upbraids the Morrison government for its digital platform reforms (Rozner, 2019), chastises the Victorian Liberal Party for lacking ideological purity ('they suck') (IPA, 2019b), consistently rails against the introduction of the Covid-19 contact tracing app (see IPA, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d), and pillories the Coalition for its 2021 federal budget (Wild, 2021).

[114] Lowy has since returned to the production of *Lowy Institute Papers*. These are full-length books published by Penguin Random House Australia.

Less-esteemed institutes may not make this transition so smoothly. The production of inconsequential 'commentary' in the absence of more substantive research negatively impacts perceptions of credibility. Rich (2004, pp. 214-215) highlights the growing prevalence of 'commentary-dressed-up-as-research' and the resultant impact on think tanks' competitive positioning. As such, think tanks need to be both credible and useful to command a privileged position in the policy space. The careful balance between analytical rigour and report accessibility impacts the attention elites afford think tank research.

Unsurprisingly, survey data shows that most federal parliamentarians (61 per cent) prefer '*policy briefs or summary research*' over '*comprehensive, in-depth reports*' (25 per cent).[115] But less expected, a plurality of surveyed journalists (48 per cent) prefer to receive '*comprehensive, in-depth reports*' over '*policy briefs or summary research*' (46 per cent), perhaps reflecting journalists' issue or coverage specialisations.[116] Regardless, the results show that there is demand for both content formats, and a clear implication that think tanks must ensure that they carefully match the style of their written content with their target audience preferences.

Some big-budgeted institutes are prolific producers of written content. For instance, The Australia Institute produced ninety-eight research reports between June 2019 and June 2020. These reports incorporate short-form informative pieces and lengthier, more analytical research reports. In contrast, the lesser-endowed Per Capita produced fourteen reports over this period (mostly comprehensive papers).[117] Material resources plainly play an important role in the style and frequency of think tank outputs.

Think tanks with fewer resources look for innovative ways to augment their influence and build their policy capacity. For example, the Menzies Research Centre partially translated its *Shattered Opportunities* report into Mandarin before the 2019 federal election to appeal to an 'Asian-born Australian' audience (interview with Cater, 2019; Cater and Slater, 2019). And the Chifley Research Centre collaborated with professional-services firm PwC Australia to produce its policy piece *Closing the Gender Pay Gap* (Gale, 2019b; interview with Gale, 2019a). The impact of resources is nevertheless more discernible when examining the breadth of think tank methods rather than their depth.

[115] The remainder had '*no preference*'.
[116] The remainder had '*no preference*'.
[117] Both counts exclude parliamentary submissions.

Access to digital technology has enabled think tanks of all sizes to reach a mass market. But effective think-tanking requires so much more than launching a report on social media with occasional follow-up posts. Building momentum for a policy idea requires persistent promotion. John Roskam from the IPA explains:

> Ten years ago, you would simply produce a hundred-page report and send it to politicians and public servants. Now, you produce a hundred-page report; you produce a one-page summary; you make a video; you tweet about it; you go on Sky and you talk about it; you issue a press release; you might write to your members about it (interview, 2019).

Of course, most think tanks would welcome the IPA's resource base and the attendant ability to promote research using multiple methods. For example, the IPA elevated its policy capacity by installing a recording studio in its Melbourne-based offices to support the production of its audio-visual content.[118] But the IPA is not alone in this regard. CEDA has had a similar on-site audio-visual facility for a lengthier period.[119] Modestly endowed institutes simply do not have these options. While the intellectual abilities within smaller institutes might be no different to that of large institutes, large institutes demonstrably dominate the ideas marketplace. Large institutes have a broader range of methods available and can inject themselves into multiple political arenas, providing multiple pathways to influence.

So, what would institutes do if they could access increased funding? How would they apply an imagined increase to augment their influence? Figure 7.3 provides insights. This survey question vividly illustrates the difference between material resources and policy capacity. Think tank respondents diverge in their hypothetical allocation of the funding supplement, variously choosing to augment policy capacities at different levels (individual, organisational, or systemic) and in different competencies (analytical, operational, or political) (Wu et al., 2018).

[118] John Roskam (and his assistant) discussed these renovations in an interview at the Melbourne-based IPA offices (interview, 2019).

[119] This author observed the CEDA facility during an interview with Jarrod Ball at the Melbourne-based CEDA offices (interview, 2019).

Figure 7-3: An imagined funding increase[120]

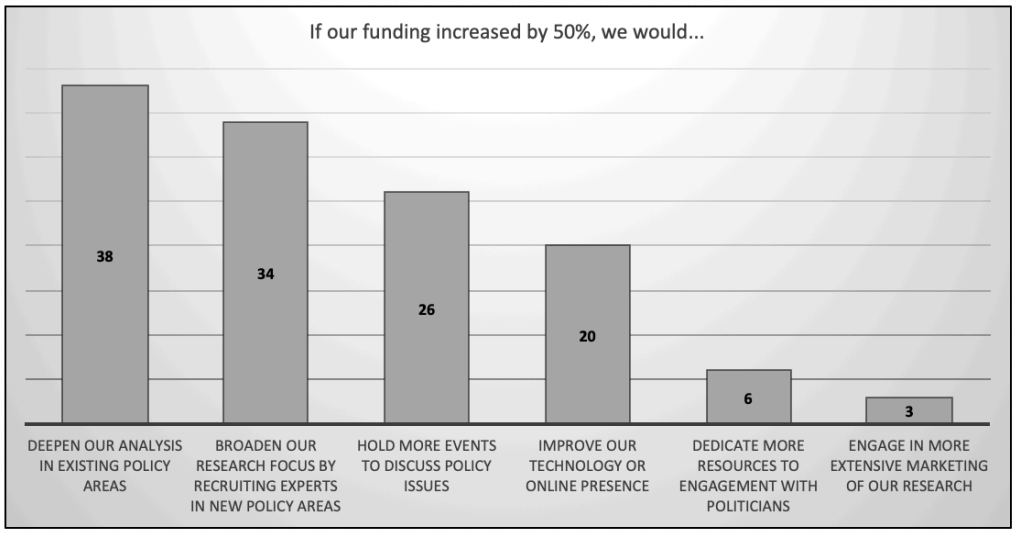


Figure 7.3 shows that think tanks are mindful of their foundational purpose. This chapter has emphasised the importance and utility of think tank marketing, but '*more extensive marketing'* is considered the lowest priority with an imagined boost to funding. Instead, the clear priorities are the two research-related categories ('*broaden our research focus*' and '*deepen our analysis'*). Indeed, in raw numbers, '*more extensive marketing'* attracted just three responses compared to a combined seventy-two votes for the research-related options. Think tanks understand that sophisticated content and informed analysis make them most relevant to their audiences.

This chapter earlier showed that the effective marketing of policy ideas is at least as important as the quality of those ideas. How does this finding reconcile with the frail support for the 'marketing' response category in Figure 7.3? It indicates that idea generation and research production are expensive activities relative to the cost of marketing. Consequential research requires expert scholars, and these scholars command compensation beyond the reach of many think tanks.[121] On the other hand, marketing does not necessarily require dollars – it requires time. For a think tank, marketing involves television and radio appearances, meeting with key audiences (such as policymakers), and preparing webinars and podcasts, all in support of the institute's policy ideas and perspectives. Additional funding is more logically applied to the production of expensive research. Thereafter, the think tank

[120] Survey participants could select up to two response categories for this question. Figure 7.3 details one-hundred-and-thirty-two responses.
[121] Notwithstanding the typically uncompensated contributions of Research Fellows.

scholar or the incumbent executive body can proselytise the institute's intellectual contributions.

7.4 Public Events and Seminars

Supporter events and seminars allow think tanks to promote specific policy ideas and directly engage a captive audience. For some institutes, events also provide another avenue to raise funds. This author attended forty-three live events organised by sixteen unique think tanks between March 2019 and June 2020.[122] This observational fieldwork facilitates the direct analysis of a key think tank influence mechanism.

Public events serve multiple purposes, but it is possible to organise them into four categories:

- Policy events – where the host institute presents a specific, internally produced policy proposal;
- Philosophical events – where an institute propagates an idea or ideology intrinsic to the institute itself (presented by an internal or external actor);
- Informative events – where an external actor (typically a university scholar) discusses a general social, economic or political issue, but the host institute does not itself present a specific proposal or view;
- Hybrid events – where an external actor (typically a politician) addresses a *policy* issue, but the host institute does not present a specific proposal or view.

Seventeen of the forty-three observed seminars were 'informative events', while only ten were 'policy events' (nine were 'philosophical' and seven were 'hybrid'). More broadly, these events seek to define issues and set agendas, but predominantly facilitate in-person member engagement.

The four proposed categories have a unifying characteristic: they all target an informed public (interviews with Dwyer, 2019; P. Jennings, 2019; Stanford, 2019). Think tank events do not attract the 'general public'. The events mostly target a socially aware and politically

[122] Appendix M provides a list of these forty-three events.

enlightened audience interested in national and international affairs. Ian Marsh (2007) extols the societal benefits of an informed public but, at the same time, points to the degradation of Australia's political and policy conversations. Think tanks play a small but meaningful role in correcting this decay by directly engaging informed audiences and encouraging the dissemination of their agenda-setting political messages.

Policy institutes tend to gravitate toward a particular event style (or category). For example, the AIIA conducts informative events, consistent with its mandate to 'promote an interest in and understanding of international affairs' (AIIA, 2020a). The CIS is very philosophical, typically promoting the professed virtues of classical liberalism. The Australian Fabians adopt a similarly philosophical style but on a smaller scale and with a progressive focus. The Grattan Institute unrelentingly focuses on policy events.

Interestingly, the Perth USAsia Centre has taken deliberate steps to reorient itself away from informative- and hybrid-events toward policy-style events. The Chief Executive Officer of the Perth USAsia Centre, Gordon Flake, advises that only 10 per cent of the hundreds of events that the institute has held since its inception (in 2012) focus on the Centre's original content (interview, 2019). Flake now sees events as an effective way to elevate the Centre's prominence by promoting its proprietary intellectual contributions. Like the Perth USAsia Centre, CEDA runs an extensive events program and engages diverse audiences across the country. CEDA conducts events to advance its perspectives on specific policy issues and provide networking opportunities to its business-community members.

Some think tanks see public events in a broader context. The CIS's substantial investment in functional office space allows it to hold events in-house, thereby illustrating the enormous benefits of its financial wherewithal. CIS events are intimate affairs; cosy, and club-like. CIS staffers – especially Executive Director Tom Switzer – mingle with attendees before and after the scheduled seminar. Fundraising is at the front of mind. A card-reader on the CIS reception counter states, "Let's spread good ideas!" along with a "Tap to Donate" function (with suggested amounts).[123] Events provide a conduit to influence and, for enterprising institutes, represent a means to encourage stronger relationships with a current and prospective member base.

[123] This author attended five in-person CIS events before the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Other think tanks are conspicuous by their apparent lack of enthusiasm for events. It took the onset of coronavirus to prod The Australia Institute in the direction of a more structured (and less expensive) live (online) events program (in contrast to its previously ad-hoc '*Politics in the Pub'* events). The Australia Institute held sixteen live online events over twelve weeks during Australia's first nationwide coronavirus lockdown, enabling it to engage audiences beyond its usual Canberra confines (TAI, 2020b).[124] And despite holding occasional members-only functions, the IPA largely eschews public events. Says John Roskam: 'why would we run an event for five-hundred people when you can put the same effort into a video that can get fifty-thousand views?' (interview with Roskam, 2019). Section 7.6.2 more extensively examines the relative attraction of audio-visual content.

Think tanks can attract high profile political speakers to events because they allow politicians to reach an informed audience in a controlled environment – a 'safe-space' if you will. In the final quarter of 2019, this author attended seminars involving the Foreign Minister Marise Payne (at the USSC), Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese (Chifley), former Prime Minister Tony Abbott (Lowy), and former Prime Minister John Howard (CIS). Other events during the same period featured Prime Minister Scott Morrison (Lowy), Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg (CEDA), Defence Minister Linda Reynolds (at the US-based Hudson Institute), and former Foreign Minister Julie Bishop (CIS). These speakers use the profile, reputation and credibility of the host institute to legitimise their ideas. The fora are platforms to advance unmediated messages to a captive audience.

In short, events allow think tanks to persuade or inform an attentive public. And depending on an institute's reputation and credibility (and political and commercial connections), these events allow think tanks to introduce elite actors to their valued audiences.

7.5 Political Access

Policy institute representatives can directly advance their perspectives and proposals if they can engage policymakers personally. This section examines both the nature and the extent of think tanks' political access. It shows that some think tanks successfully gain access to senior

[124] These twelve weeks stretched from March 25, 2020, to June 12, 2020.

politicians (in the present analysis, at the state-government level), but those engagements typically privilege agenda-setting rather than seeking to advance specific policy proposals.

Think tank scholars have long documented the attraction and importance of political access, showing that it provides institutes with an opportunity to personally appeal their preferences to decision-makers (see Dahl, 1970; Dickson, 1972; Critchlow, 1985; Lindquist, 1989; Abelson, 1996). Australian parliamentarians are apparently amenable to such approaches. Original survey data shows that 36 per cent of parliamentarian respondents believe that think tanks can have the greatest impact on public policy when they directly provide policy expertise to politicians.[125]

Some think tankers have leveraged their relationships to help launch their own political careers. The Federal Member for Goldstein, Tim Wilson (Liberal), was formerly an employee of the Institute of Public Affairs, while Liberal Senator James Paterson also enjoyed a lengthy tenure at the IPA (Parliament of Australia, 2020c). Additionally, the Executive Director of the IPA, John Roskam, has unsuccessfully sought pre-selection for the Liberal Party on two occasions (Roskam, 2019; O'Malley, 2020). Such circumstances have drawn criticism, with some commentators suggesting that these appointments stretch the intimacy of the IPA's reach to the highest levels of the Australian government (see, for example, Farrelly, 2016). Perhaps seduced by these possibilities, other think tankers have unsuccessfully attempted similar moves. For example, Sam Crosby – Executive Director of the McKell Institute and former policy advisor in the NSW Labor government – ran as a Labor candidate in the 2019 Federal election but was defeated. And Tim Hollo – Executive Director of the Green Institute and a former staffer for the Australian Greens – ran as a Green candidate for the seat of Canberra in the 2019 Federal election but was also defeated. These examples illustrate the inclination of some think tank executives to leverage their political access (and positions of influence) into positions of power (Appendix N expands on the so-called 'revolving door' phenomenon, where think-tankers and government officials rotate between these two fields).

But elected officials are not solely – nor perhaps primarily – the actors think tanks seek to engage. The Australian Public Service plays a significant role (at least historically) in policy

[125] The relationship with political parties is not statistically significant.

formulation and is an important target for direct think tank engagement.[126] Katie McRobert from the Australian Farm Institute makes the point:

> In Australian political life, where an MP's role as a decision-maker can be short-lived, sometimes there is limited value for a think tank in investing in a relationship with someone who could be out of that role in the next election cycle – or who is only interested in short-termism – as opposed to someone working in the field for decades (interview, 2019).

Mary Crawford from the TJ Ryan Foundation also highlights the importance of backbencher engagement, noting that they are oft-neglected parliamentary constituents (interview, 2019). The pivotal role of ministerial advisers ('minders') is similarly important. Minders are the conduit to ministers and are 'often more important than the public service in the way politics gets done' (Dobell, 2016). Policy institutes need first to negotiate the gatekeepers if they are to obtain an audience with the minister.

It is challenging to assess the extent of policy institutes' political access systematically. Indeed, at the federal level, it is near impossible (interview data enables some insights). But it is possible at the state government level. New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory all publish minister's diaries, allowing their examination over an extended period.

This thesis examined all minister's diaries (incumbent and former) in these three jurisdictions to identify meetings with any of the ninety-three think tanks in the present population (the period under examination stretched from January 2015 to December 2019).[127] This examination revealed that state government ministers meet with an *enormous* number of non-governmental actors. And the diversity of these external parties is equally vast. These observations are not trivial as they demonstrate the challenges external actors encounter when trying to influence the views or actions of high-ranking officials. It is also important not to overstate the importance of these meetings. While the diary results provide illuminating content, they do not account for think tank engagement in the public service

[126] See Tiernan (2011) and Lindquist and Tiernan (2011) for a discussion on the role and policy capacity of the APS.

[127] This author manually inspected these diaries between December 2019 and February 2020 (see, ACT Government, 2020; NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2020; Queensland Government, 2020). The federal government does not publish minister's diaries.

arena or think tank involvement in broader policy networks. These minister meetings are just one element of a more comprehensive policy influence process.

The diaries of state government ministers are revealing. New South Wales government ministers had one-hundred-and-forty-nine individual meetings with representatives from twenty-one unique think tanks over these five years; Queensland government ministers had sixty-seven meetings with nineteen unique think tanks during this period, and; ACT ministers had twelve meetings with six unique think tanks (the ACT has only published ministerial diaries since January 2018). For context, individual ministers in NSW and Queensland had *thousands* of meetings over this period. Thus, the prevalence of think tanks is notable, but they are far from predominant. Appendix O contains the full list of think tank meetings with state government ministers.

Think tanks ideological persuasions (and their compatibility with the governing party's) appear to have a mixed impact on meeting frequency.[128] Of the twenty-one unique think tanks that met with the right-leaning Coalition government ministers in NSW, three possess a rightward orientation, five have a leftward orientation, and the balance are centrist. On the other hand, left-leaning Labor government ministers in Queensland met with twelve left-leaning think tanks but zero right-leaning think tanks (centrist institutes make up the balance). Queensland government ministers' dearth of broader engagement might reflect an intrinsic resistance to right-leaning proposals, or right-leaning think tanks' aversion to such meetings. In the ACT, the government met with two left-leaning think tanks, and the balance were centrist. Triangulating this diary data with interview and survey data does not enhance its comprehensibility. It is therefore imprudent to draw more general inferences from this competing but provocative data.

This study places think tanks' ministerial meetings into two categories based on the detail contained in the diary records: 'issue-focused' (private meetings that address identifiable policy issues) or 'ceremonial' (typically less-specific engagements sometimes involving multiple entities). Both meeting types allow for the 'exchange of policy-relevant information' (Beyers, 2002, p. 587), but 'issue-focused' meetings are more likely to specifically advance think tank preferences. This categorical distinction provides a framework to

[128] Over these five years, NSW had a Coalition government, QLD had a Labor government, and the ACT a Labor government.

distinguish the relative importance of these meetings (the 'nature' of these meetings, rather than their 'extent').

But first, which policy institutes predominate in the political access game? Unsurprisingly, the Committee for Sydney stands out in NSW, notching up thirty-six separate meetings with government ministers over these five years. But the undisputed champion in all three jurisdictions is a surprise. Infrastructure Partnerships Australia tallied forty-five meetings in NSW (*30 per cent* of all think tank meetings), eight meetings in Queensland, and five meetings in the ACT.[129]

Infrastructure Partnerships Australia meetings are substantially 'issue-focused', suggesting that these Australian states value the institute's intellectual offerings. Adrian Dwyer, the institute's Chief Executive Officer, contends that 'it's not hard to get access to politicians – our access is purely based on thinking [that] we're sensible' (interview, 2019). Australian state governments' enormous infrastructure spending plans might also smooth the path for the non-ideological Infrastructure Partnerships Australia.[130]

It is not possible to discern from the diary data whether the direct interactions between think tanks and government ministers are consequential. But this study made requests under the NSW Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 for further details on eight specific meetings.[131] The additional GIPA-sourced information shows that these meetings concentrate on issue framing rather than the propagation of specific policy proposals. More broadly, coupling this diary analysis with interview data indicates that the more intimate policy discussions between think tanks and policymakers occur at the departmental or adviser level. That is, broader perspectives are discussed at the elected-official level to create space for more specific think tank proposals advanced elsewhere.

Think tanks also access policymakers through other fora. For example, parliamentary inquiries and track dialogues allow think tanks to directly participate in the policy process.[132]

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[129] Infrastructure Partnerships Australia is a Sydney-based infrastructure-focussed think tank with an Australia-wide purview. The institute focuses on public policy research and seeks to 'shape public debate and drive reform for the national interest' (Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, 2020).

[130] For example, the NSW Treasurer announced a $93 billion infrastructure spending package as part of its State Budget in 2019 (Perrottet, 2019).

[131] The GIPA requests (more commonly referred to as 'freedom of information' requests) covered meetings involving the Lowy Institute, CIS, IPA, and The Australia Institute.

[132] Parliamentary committees 'investigate specific matters of policy or government administration or performance' (Parliament of Australia, 2020b).

For think tanks, participation in committee inquiries typically necessitates a written submission, followed thereafter by a possible appearance at a public hearing.

Some think tanks see parliamentary inquiries as opportunities to explicitly engage attentive policymaking audiences. The Centre for Policy Development and Per Capita are active contributors and see great value in the process (interviews with Dawson, 2019b; T. McLeod, 2019). On the other hand, inquiries are not a priority for either CEDA or the CIS (interviews with Ball, 2019; Lindsay, 2019). Some, such as the Whitlam Institute, are not active but would like to be (interview with L. Smith, 2019). Others are active but question the value. Kim Houghton from the Regional Australia Institute references his institute's frequent participation but demurs: 'is it worthwhile? I don't know. It's a real challenge for us' (interview, 2019). Think tanks possess finite resources, and it is apparent that this type of engagement represents a trade-off for many institutes. There is no consensus amongst think tanks on the value of inquiry participation.

Think tanks with an international orientation also access the political process through participation in Track-1.5 and Track-2 diplomacy.[133] In Australia, the Institute for Regional Security asserts that it has been 'a leader in Track-1.5 dialogues for nearly two decades' (IFRS, 2020). Similarly, the National Executive Director of the AIIA, Bryce Wakefield, points to the AIIA's participation in track dialogues as evidence of the institute's long tradition of political neutrality and its even-handed promotion of informed discussion (interview, 2019). There might be limited opportunities to participate in these dialogues, but for some institutes track diplomacy is an important activity that affords them unique opportunities to contribute to the policy process.

7.6 New Media

Much has been written about think tanks use of traditional media, and it is beyond dispute that television and newspaper coverage remains a priority for Australian policy institutes (see, for example, I. Marsh, 1980; Ricci, 1993; Rich, 1999; Abelson, 2009; Medvetz, 2014). Chong and Druckman (2007) show that the mass public is susceptible to persuasion through policy

[133] Track-1.5 diplomacy refers to 'non-official meetings usually attended by officials (acting in their private capacity)' along with non-official actors, including academics and think tanks. Track-2 diplomacy refers to 'the unofficial channel for political, economic and security dialogue', primarily consisting of non-official actors (Capie and Evans, 2007, pp. 231-235).

issue framing. It is therefore no surprise that a battle of ideas is ferociously fought in the media space.

Original survey data shows that most journalists (52 per cent) believe that think tanks can have the most significant influence on public policy when they target public opinion via the media.[134] This result is unsurprising. Robert Dahl (1970, p. 257) previously contended that 'control over the content of the mass media is a political resource of great importance.' In the present day, think tanks seek to influence or control policy narratives through both traditional media and new media. These crucial conduits facilitate institutes' outreach efforts and are of equal importance. But the analysis here focuses on new media, a hitherto under-studied think tank influence medium.

7.6.1 Social Media

Relatively few studies specifically address think tanks use of new media (for one example, see Manfredi-Sánchez et al., 2015). In most think tank-centric studies, the topic is on the periphery. But away from the think tank world, social media's impact on the political process has received intense scrutiny. This body of literature has immediate implications for policy institutes. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014, pp. 625-627) find that individuals who primarily use social media as an information source are more active participants in the political process. In the present context, think tanks seek to be the source of this information.

Information provision helps think tanks influence the understanding and interpretation of policy issues; it also helps them activate their adherents. It follows that think tanks can supercharge their idea diffusion by connecting with information-seeking users of social media. Of course, think tanks do not necessarily seek disciples. Ideologically-detached institutes, such as the Productivity Commission or the Australian Institute of Family Studies, primarily use social media to inform their audience about their research and analysis. But some advocacy tanks do covet opinion leaders and influencers. For example, Julia Thornton from the Australian Fabians makes it clear: the Fabians seek to 'empower people to go out and make their own arguments to whoever their audience is' (interview, 2019). Weeks et al. (2017) find that opinion leaders actively seek to persuade others on political issues via social media. A

[134] Nineteen per cent of journalists selected '*directly provide expertise to politicians*', 18 per cent were '*unsure*', and 11 per cent selected '*participate in parliamentary hearings*'.

well-targeted social media strategy can therefore amplify think tanks' efforts to influence. And most institutes are cognisant of the potential.

Seventy-seven of the ninety-three institutes in this study have active Twitter accounts, and seventy have active Facebook pages.[135] This study examined activity statistics on each of these platforms for all identified institutes over one year.[136] The results are revealing in many ways, but one finding particularly stands out: left-leaning institutes completely dominate these social media platforms. Table 7.1 lists the top ten think tanks according to some simple metrics – followers (on Twitter) and likes (on Facebook).[137]

Table 7-1: Think tank social media presence

Twitter Top 10		Facebook Top 10		Combined Top 10	
Entity	Followers	Entity	Likes	Entity	Aggregate
Australian Human Rights Commission	59,700	Climate Council	267,307	Climate Council	321,007
Lowy Institute	59,300	Institute for Economics and Peace	173,374	Institute for Economics and Peace	207,574
Climate Council	53,700	Australian Human Rights Commission	99,566	Australian Human Rights Commission	159,266
Institute for Economics and Peace	34,200	The Australia Institute	46,474	Lowy Institute	87,135
The Australia Institute	28,400	McKell Institute	31,757	The Australia Institute	74,874
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	28,400	Lowy Institute	27,835	Australian Strategic Policy Institute	50,842
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	20,900	Australian Institute of Criminology	22,955	McKell Institute	38,234
Grattan Institute	19,700	Australian Strategic Policy Institute	22,442	Institute of Public Affairs	32,427
Institute of Public Affairs	16,100	International Water Centre	21,079	Australian Institute of Criminology	31,092
Beyond Zero Emissions	14,700	Institute of Public Affairs	16,327	Beyond Zero Emissions	28,422

Only one right-leaning think tank – the IPA – makes it into the top ten on any of the three measures. On the other hand, four left-leaning think tanks enjoy top-ten status on Twitter and Facebook (the Climate Council, Institute for Economics and Peace, The Australia Institute, and Beyond Zero Emissions) and five in the combined measure (add the McKell Institute). The combined top-ten underlines the extent of the divergence: an aggregate of 670,111 on the left versus 32,427 on the right.

Year-on-year change data (from 2019 to 2020) show that the fastest-growing institutes (on an aggregate basis across Twitter and Facebook) are all left-leaning: the Institute for Economics and Peace, Climate Council and The Australia Institute (see Appendix P for further detail). Normalising the results (by dividing followers and likes by the number of weeks an

[135] LinkedIn is not as prominent and is excluded from this analysis.

[136] The activity snapshots were taken on May 1, 2019, and May 1, 2020. Appendix A notes that upon review, the Australian Human Rights Commission would likely be removed from this thesis' population. The results and analysis here are not impacted by its inclusion.

[137] 'Likes' is the favoured metric on Facebook (as opposed to 'followers') because it more accurately reflects the number of genuine adherents. For example, it is likely that The Australia Institute 'follows' the IPA, and vice versa, but it is unlikely that they actually 'like' their feed. Regardless, the two measures do not significantly diverge.

entity has been on-platform) leaves the top ten Twitter constituents unchanged. But there are several changes to the Facebook rankings. The IPA drops out of the Facebook top ten (the IPA's 'likes' per week are decreasing) and is replaced by the conservative Freedom for Faith. Otherwise, left-leaning institutes continue to dominate (as Appendix P details). Left-leaning institutes' prominence on social media is recognised by politicians, with one federal parliamentarian observing that The Australia Institute '[do] a lot more social media, social media campaigning, and [it] combines its research with an advocacy, a media, and a public debate program' (Anonymous Interviewee H, 2020).

The social media penetration of left-leaning institutes places them in a commanding position in the contest of ideas on these networking sites. Xenos et al. (2014) demonstrate that social media use has a strong and positive relationship with levels of political engagement. The expanding supremacy of the left in this medium translates into an enhanced influence potential. But the influence of whom? Younger people dominate the use of social media (Xenos et al., 2014, p. 163; Vromen et al., 2016). Indeed, 97 per cent of Australians under twenty-five have a Facebook account (Vromen, 2017, p. 51). Left-leaning institutes will attract both young and old(er) followers – as will right-leaning institutes. But the relative balance is unambiguously skewed.

The Australian Electoral Study (AES) shows that 81 per cent of eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds voted for left-leaning parties (Labor and the Greens) in the 2019 federal election, demonstrating that young people in Australia have a strong affinity with progressive ideas (Cameron and McAllister, 2019, p. 18). This imbalance substantially explains the enormous divergence in Twitter and Facebook followers of left- and right-leaning institutes. But the effectiveness of outreach strategies might also explain some of the divergence.

One institute stands out for having the most complete and purposeful young-person engagement strategy: the right-leaning Institute of Public Affairs. This assertion seems counterintuitive – it is clear that left-leaning institutes dominate the social networking field. However, beyond the dedicated efforts of the progressive institute Australia21, only the IPA has an identifiable strategy deliberately targeting young people *with* purposively curated content.[138] The IPA strategy involves two key pillars: the *Young IPA Podcast* and the

[138] Several other policy institutes advertise young-person engagement efforts but produce little in the way of dedicated content. These include The Australian Fabians ('*Young Fabians'*), China Matters ('*Young Professionals*') and the AIIA ('*Youth Engagement'*).

Generation Liberty program. The *Young IPA Podcast* is generationally different from any other think tank podcast in Australia. It seeks to entertain. It is dynamic, irreverent, and directly addresses issues relevant to their (presumed) young audience – all the while promoting the professed virtues of neoliberalism.

The IPA's *Generation Liberty* program explicitly seeks to engage university students. Dedicated campus coordinators are at the core of the program, and (across sixteen universities in six Australian states) these coordinators prioritise in-person engagement to promote the IPA's deeply held philosophical convictions (IPA, 2020e). The IPA is ambitious with its plans. Renee Gorman – National Director of the *Generation Liberty* program – advises that an IPA goal is to 'reach ten per cent of young people in Australia on a weekly basis' (interview, 2020).[139]

There is scant evidence to suggest that the observed social media follower disparity is due to superior strategic *outreach* by left-leaning institutes. The IPA invests heavily in its young-person outreach program, and there is no other institute that approaches the IPA's sophistication in this regard. Nevertheless, the underlying *messages* from left-leaning think tanks do resonate more acutely with this younger audience (using AES data as a proxy). Regardless, the IPA's ongoing efforts paradoxically suggest that left-leaning think tanks are influencing the perspectives of young social media users. The IPA believes that an attractively packaged message of 'freedom and liberty' can persuade young people to join its stable. If it did not believe this was possible, the institute would not invest as extravagantly in these programs.

Social media are enormously important tools for think tanks; tools that can enhance the ability to connect to and influence a targeted audience. Long-form new media content can do the same.

7.6.2 Podcasts and Videos

Podcasts should be natural terrain for think tanks. The medium facilitates issue discussion, information provision, insight sharing, and influence exertion. Podcasts prosecute complex issues at length, whereas social networking sites attract only transient contemplation.

[139] The IPA defines 'young people' as those between seventeen and twenty-five years of age.

Presenting ideas in this accessible digital format should therefore appeal. So why do relatively few think tanks actually produce podcasts?

Podcasts require the commitment of valuable resources, and their consistent production depends on the availability and commitment of human hosts. Larger institutes will have an advantage in this regard. But podcast production appears to be lower on the priority spectrum for lesser-resourced institutes with competing internal foci.

Think tanks must match their methods with their target audience selections and the types of influence they seek. In this regard, some institutes curate their podcasts with great purpose. Katherine Mansted from the National Security College (and former host of the *National Security Podcast*) articulates a clear intent: 'we position the podcast to appeal to those in national security policymaking' (email communication with Mansted, 2019). The NSC podcasts target a sophisticated audience, and their content and style neatly align with the institute's objectives. On the other hand, some institutes appreciate the utility of podcasts but misfire when it comes to execution. The McKell Institute podcasts possess neither purpose nor focus, blending an odd amalgam of topics with an inconsistent perspective of the target listener.

Only twenty-two of the ninety-three institutes in this study produce podcasts.[140] This author listened to two-hundred-and-fourteen individual episodes from these twenty-two entities over one year.[141] The podcasts averaged forty-five minutes in length, providing approximately one-hundred-and-fifty-eight hours of content (see Appendix Q for the full list).

The podcasts cover an enormous range of topics. Some of these are widely accessible and target the general public; others more particularly target an informed public. Still others are highly technical, tackling complex issues that are likely to appeal to an expert audience. In general, think tank podcasts conform to six distinct formats:

- Purposive podcast – policy research
- Purposive podcast – academic research
- Purposive podcast – discussion forum
- Event recording – policy research
- Event recording – academic research

[140] Census was taken in June-July 2020.
[141] All podcasts were accessed via the '*Podcast App'* between June 2019 and July 2020.

- Event recording – discussion forum

These categorical distinctions begin with the original format of the podcast. Some think tanks, such as the Whitlam Institute and the CIS, record their in-person events and thereafter make them accessible as podcasts. Others produce dedicated content for standalone podcasts. The second categorical distinction comes from the podcast objective. Some, such as the Grattan Institute, demonstrably target policy influence. For Grattan, podcasts are another way to propagate policy ideas. They are a conduit for research and a means-to-an-end. Others, such as the Development Policy Centre, use podcasts to promote policy-relevant academic research. But most entities use podcasts to inform discussion on issues of interest. In policy cycle terms, podcasts primarily define issues and set agendas.

Think tanks have not universally embraced podcasts despite their apparent utility. This might be because podcast listenership is relatively low compared to the numbers flocking to social media platforms. But some institutes (such as the NSC) prefer to more intimately engage a specific group of consequential actors in the long-form format versus a larger number of transient users on social networking sites. Regardless, the popularity of podcasts is difficult to discern because of the number of competing podcast platforms. But the penetration and viewership of video content are, in contrast, readily accessible.

Forty-eight entities in the present study have their own *YouTube* channel – a surprisingly large number.[142] A *YouTube* channel allows content curators (think tanks, in the present case) to organise video content in a central location for convenient user access. Table 7.2 lists the top ten think tanks with *YouTube* channels sorted by total viewership numbers.[143,144]

[142] This author viewed fifty web-based think tank videos with an aggregate twenty-six hours of content (see Appendix R for the full list).

[143] Video viewership numbers are more useful than channel subscriber numbers because they demonstrate true content penetration (non-subscribers can also view video content).

[144] The video viewership numbers were tallied on June 14, 2020, and the data was first analysed soon thereafter. The numbers were updated on October 9, 2021, to ensure the continued validity of the inferences. The circumstances in 2021 are largely unchanged, except for one significant development. The Centre for Independent Studies has jumped ahead of the IPA at the top of the table by doubling its views and subscriber base. Much of this jump comes from the four-hundred-and-forty *thousand* views of one video featuring esteemed scholars Kishore Mahbubani and John Mearsheimer debating Asian-region geopolitics (CIS, 2020c).

Table 7-2: YouTube video viewership

	Jun 14, 2020		Oct 9, 2021	
Entity	Views	Subscribers	Views	Subscribers
Institute of Public Affairs	2,551,435	20,600	2,819,648	24,300
The Centre for Independent Studies	1,999,079	16,400	4,082,125	35,900
Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)	1,670,970	3,630	2,466,613	5,990
The Australia Institute	579,119	1,100	798,726	5,560
United States Studies Centre	483,912	Unknown	575,206	Unknown
Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)	399,642	393	565,598	Unknown
Climate Council	291,453	1,540	385,723	2,110
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	206,376	740	276,794	1,070
Lowy Institute	189,013	1,860	571,235	6,350
Australian Institute of International Affairs	165,240	952	397,483	3,720

The numbers at the top of the viewership table are striking. Indeed, the extent to which right-leaning institutes (the IPA and the CIS) dominate this medium is confounding. In the social networking world, left-leaning institutes handsomely outrank those on the right. But here, the opposite prevails. The IPA alone has more video views than the combined total of all left-leaning think tanks (using 2020 data). And the growth rate in the IPA numbers is similarly impressive – subscriber numbers have doubled every year since 2017, and video views have jumped 60 per cent per year over the same period.[145]

A closer examination of the viewership numbers reveals the true extent of the chasm between left- and right-leaning institutes. The IPA registers thirty-seven individual videos with more than *ten thousand* views. Although the AHRC has a similarly impressive twenty-five videos that exceed ten-thousand views, the dominant left-leaning think tank and the best comparator to the IPA – The Australia Institute – has but two (one of which is a thirty-second commercial with four-hundred-and-seventy-six thousand views – the equivalent of 82 per cent of The Australia Institute's aggregate views).[146]

Subscriber numbers further emphasise the pre-eminence of right-leaning institutes. The IPA has nineteen times more subscribers than The Australia Institute and eleven times more than the digitally-savvy Lowy Institute.[147] Subscriber numbers are important because they

[145] Data from prior years were sourced using the internet archive website *Wayback Machine*. A snapshot of the IPA *YouTube* subscriber numbers and video views was archived on June 23, 2017. Subscriber numbers were 2,429, and video views totalled 637,075 at this date (IPA, 2017b). The compound annual growth rate since 2017 is 104 per cent for subscribers and 59 per cent for video views.

[146] At the revision date in 2021, the IPA had forty-six videos exceeding ten thousand views, while The Australia Institute still had two.

[147] The IPA's subscriber numbers were approximately five times larger than The Australia Institute and four times larger than the Lowy Institute as of the revision date in 2021.

evidence the number of committed and ongoing consumers of the producer's video content. It is apparent that right-leaning institutes have a very committed audience.

The data indicate that the major centre-right institutes purposively engage audiences. These think tanks have invested in platforms that require extended focus rather than platforms that attract fleeting attention. Just as social networking sites are the hub for left-leaning institutes (away from their websites), podcasts and video-sharing sites are the hubs for right-leaning institutes. These divergent paths also reflect an understanding of audience preferences and accessibility. The IPA's John Roskam is seemingly unimpressed with some social networking sites: 'Twitter is not social media. Twitter is a left-wing elite talking to itself' (interview, 2019). Right-leaning institutes have resolved that they can best communicate with their target audience through podcasts and video-sharing. They are succeeding in doing so.

Many centrist institutes are sophisticated exponents of digital technologies. They stand apart from ideological think tanks by prioritising investment in website interactives and enhancing web page sophistication and functionality.[148] Centrist institutes mainly see social media as a conduit rather than a primary means to package and showcase ideas. The contrast is readily discernible. Ideological institutes covet followers and subscribers in the digital world, whereas most centrist think tanks instead prioritise the organisation and accessibility of their content catalogue on their proprietary websites. These differences are emblematic of their typological classifications. Institutes leaning left or right are primarily 'advocacy tanks'. Centrist institutes are mostly 'universities-without-students' (or 'academic' think tanks). Their respective methods accurately align with their inherent characteristics.

7.7 Summary

This chapter shows that think tanks are strategic and systematic when selecting methods to influence policymaking. Method preferences ultimately reflect judgements regarding how they can best inform audiences and persuade perspectives. Institute characteristics and objectives play important roles in these method decisions, while material resources again regulate the available choices.

Ideology impacts method choices in two separate ways. First, federal parliamentarians with different belief systems diverge on their receptiveness to think tank proposals and

[148] See the Lowy Institute and the Regional Australia Institute websites as examples.

engagement. Left-leaning parliamentarians universally welcome think tank policy ideation, but right-leaning parliamentarians commonly disregard their contributions. Second, left- and right-leaning think tanks embrace divergent approaches in the digital sphere. Left-leaning think tanks favour social networking sites and are highly successful in attracting large audiences on social platforms. Right-leaning institutes instead identify greater value in long-form formats such as podcasts and video production. Centrist institutes are active across both formats but elevate the importance of their dedicated home pages.

Most think tanks covet political access, and although some succeed in accessing senior-level politicians, it is apparent that the bureaucracy and political staffers are more often the focus of these direct engagement efforts. Ironically, the sphere in which think tanks might most successfully prosecute their influence objectives is also the area that is least transparent.

Some think tanks have achieved impressive levels of audience penetration across a variety of methods. Their marketing efforts are purposive and seemingly effective – no individual think tank in this study identified obstacles to communicating with their target audience. But this audience penetration should not be conflated with the audience influence, despite what some think tanks might suggest. Chapter Eight next examines the claims and perceptions of think tank influence.

Chapter Eight: Influence Claims and Perceptions

8.1 Introduction

Think tanks proffer expertise and propagate ideas. The value recipients attach to those ideas, and an institute's perceived effectiveness, are important determinants of prosperity in the competitive marketplace for ideas. As such, many think tanks publicly promote their purported influence on policy. Others more modestly point to their provision of insights and their development of understandings. Regardless, the perception of policy relevance is important to all think tanks. These claims and perceptions augment organisational legitimacy and, crucially, support fundraising efforts.

This study's analytical framework emphasises three evolutionary steps in policy debates: political attention, political priority, and policy priority. A think tank regarded as irrelevant, impotent, or inconsequential is unlikely to enjoy success at any stage of this framework. Instead, sophisticated think tanks carefully choreograph the awareness and appreciation of their alleged achievements, developing accepted wisdom that they are relevant and important voices in the policy process.

This chapter examines the beliefs surrounding think tank influence. Section 7.2 first explains the importance of these influence perceptions. Section 7.3 then discusses how think tanks evaluate their influence. It shows that some institutes are deliberate and methodical, but others question the merits of influence evaluation. Section 7.4 details how think tanks infer their influence and how they promote their influence claims. Far from being impotent, institutes believe they play a discernible role in the policy process. Sections 7.5 and 7.6 examine print media journalists' and federal parliamentarians' perceptions of think tank influence. These elite audiences mostly agree that think tanks play influential roles in the policy process, but there is some variation in the interpretation of its manifestation. Right-leaning parliamentarians tend to be more sceptical about think tank influence than those on the left, seeing them playing a support rather than a constructive role.

The chapter employs original survey data to compare the views of these three distinct groups. This survey data is triangulated with interview data to further contextualise the varied perspectives.

8.2 The Importance of Perceptions

In 2018, the *Australian Financial Review* rated Ben Oquist and Richard Denniss from The Australia Institute joint-tenth in the 'Covert Power' category of the '*AFR Power List 2018*' (three places behind former Prime Minister John Howard) (Coorey, 2018).[149,150] Well before Oquist's and Denniss' award, Greg Lindsay (of the CIS) was similarly designated 'the most influential man in Australia' (Bagnall, 2004). These 'achievements' are far from frivolous because they legitimise think tank claims of influence. Certainly, the think tank industry might broadly celebrate the recognition of these individuals. The perpetuation of narratives that aggrandize their roles also augments their status, situating think tanks as important players in the public policy arena. These perceptions make think tanks difficult to ignore. If a think tank is perceived as influential, it is more likely to attract attention to its varied outputs (see Doran, 2017, pp. 4-5). And attracting attention is the necessary first step when seeking to establish political and policy priorities (consistent with the Shiffman and Smith analytical framework).

The perceptions and understandings of parliamentarians and journalists are particularly important. Their acceptance of think tank legitimacy and credibility are typical preconditions for policy influence. Parliamentarians are unlikely to listen to actors they perceive as unimportant or illegitimate, and journalists are unlikely to dedicate column space to sources they believe lack credibility. Thus, there is potentially great reward for think tanks who successfully create a narrative around their effectiveness (which, of course, can only be sustained on the strength of their intellectual outputs).

Some think tanks will reject the suggestion that parliamentarian and journalist perceptions matter. Certainly, Chapter Six shows that think tanks target a variety of audiences when pursuing their objectives. For example, think tanks such as AHURI clearly concentrate their efforts on Ministers' offices and government departments and agencies. Other government-affiliated institutes (such as the Productivity Commission and Australian Institute of Family Affairs) do not actively proselytise their outputs in the public sphere. To these think tanks, the perceptions of the government bureaucracy (and, ultimately, the Australian people)

[149] The *AFR Power List* was first published in 2001 and seeks to 'identify the people with the tightest grip on the three major strands of power in this country: overt, covert, and cultural' (Drummond, 2020).

[150] The Australia Institute dedicates a full page of its 2018/19 Annual Report to receiving the '*Covert Power*' accolade (TAI, 2019, p. 5). This promulgation is particularly ironic given The Australia Institute's work on 'integrity in government' and its promise to shine a light 'into the darkest corners of our democracy' (TAI, 2021b).

are more relevant. Nevertheless, this chapter's content does apply to *most* think tanks in this study.

Perceptions of effectiveness (whether real or imaginary) are also critical for fundraising. Financial contributions are likely to be positively correlated to influence suppositions, so persuasive narratives around impact (whether in public or private) are crucial for organisational sustainability. The Executive Director of Beyond Zero Emissions, Vanessa Petrie, is clear-eyed about the importance of public recognition and perceived credibility: 'it helps with funding as well because funders want to know what's your impact; what's your street cred. It helps to demonstrate our reach and our impact' (interview, 2019).

Diane Stone (2000) asserts that think tank importance comes from their ability to construct legitimacy *for* policy prescriptions. But for this to be possible, think tanks need to first legitimate their involvement in policy debates by advancing their *own* suitability and importance. Hilsman (1967, p. 560) notes that 'power [is] in legitimacy, in legal authority, in expertise, and in special interest that is recognized as legitimate.' For think tanks to exert influence, they must foster pathways-to-influence by creating this organisational legitimacy. It is therefore important to consider think tank influence claims, *and* how those claims are received by their audience (see also Vaara and Tienari, 2008, p. 991, who investigate the discursive legitimation of corporate voices).

8.3 Influence Evaluations

Some institutes are methodical when it comes to performance assessment, although many more shun self-evaluation. Dror (1984) bemoaned the lack of willingness of US think tanks to critically self-assess their effectiveness, and Australian think tanks might equally attract such a lamentation in the present day.[151] Nevertheless, as exemplars, the Grattan Institute, Mitchell Institute and AHURI all use documented criteria to assess their effectiveness directly.

[151] See also Lindquist (1989, pp. 326-327) for a discussion on self-evaluation.

The Mitchell Institute uses a three-tier pyramid to categorise its 'success': at the base is 'awareness', in the middle is 'influence', and at the apex is 'impact'. Mitchell's framework is comparable to the modified Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework the present study adopts, although the specific criteria defining each level diverge. Mitchell strives to achieve 'impact' and actively evaluates its performance against this goal (interview with Jackson, 2019). Similarly, the Grattan Institute produces a publicly available *Program Impact Report* and designates its 'contribution' to policymaking as 'some influence', 'substantial influence', or the 'dominant voice' (Grattan, 2018b).[152] AHURI also produces a publicly available *Policy Impact Statement* which 'measures' its program impact across six separate criteria (AHURI, 2018).

Through these methodical (and candid) self-assessments, these exemplar entities construct compelling narratives around their effectiveness. They demonstrate to their target audiences – policymakers in particular – that they are important policy interlocutors and produce consequential ideas. They are at once justifying their receipt of financial contributions and perpetuating the impression (or the reality) of policy relevance.

Elsewhere, few institutes embrace this systematic approach to performance assessment. Indeed, most of the forty-one unique think tanks interviewed for this study do not perform such assessments. Graham Young from the Australian Institute of Progress suggests the process is futile and points out the need for counterfactual analysis: 'what would've happened if we hadn't done a pitch?' (interview, 2019). Nevertheless, if policy institutes claim they are influential protagonists in the policy world, then an intellectually honest approach to performance assessment will lend credibility to those claims.

Some think tank executives have strong views on their fellow industry participants' (perceived) influence, thus supporting the rationale for influence evaluations. Emma Dawson from Per Capita believes think tank influence is incontrovertible:

> There is evidence of [influence] across the board. Some of the bigger think tanks have a well-established influence on the policies of political parties. The IPA and the CIS for the Coalition, certainly; The Australia Institute on the Left; Grattan Institute in the middle (interview, 2019b).

Christopher Sheil from the left-leaning Evatt Foundation asserts that 'right-wing think tanks have had a very, very strong impact on public policy and Australian politics – no

[152] Grattan is increasingly incorporating this data into its annual reports rather than a separate document.

question' (interview, 2019). On the other hand, Andrew Pickford, Executive Director of the libertarian Mannkal Economic Education Foundation, asserts that 'the centre-left and left have been very much more successful [than right-leaning think tanks] in moving mass opinion, public sentiment, and are better at communication' (interview, 2019). But Gordon Flake of the Perth USAsia Centre throws cold water on the notion that any think tank – left, right, or centrist – can directly influence policy outcomes: 'anybody who ever says "we led to this policy or we were responsible for this action" is largely delusional' (interview, 2019). Notwithstanding Flake's comments, there is a widespread belief within the industry that think tanks can (at a minimum) influence the policy process.

8.4 Think Tank Claims

This section first examines think tank survey participants' reflections on the nature and extent of their influence. The section then analyses the ways think tanks evidence and promote their purported successes.

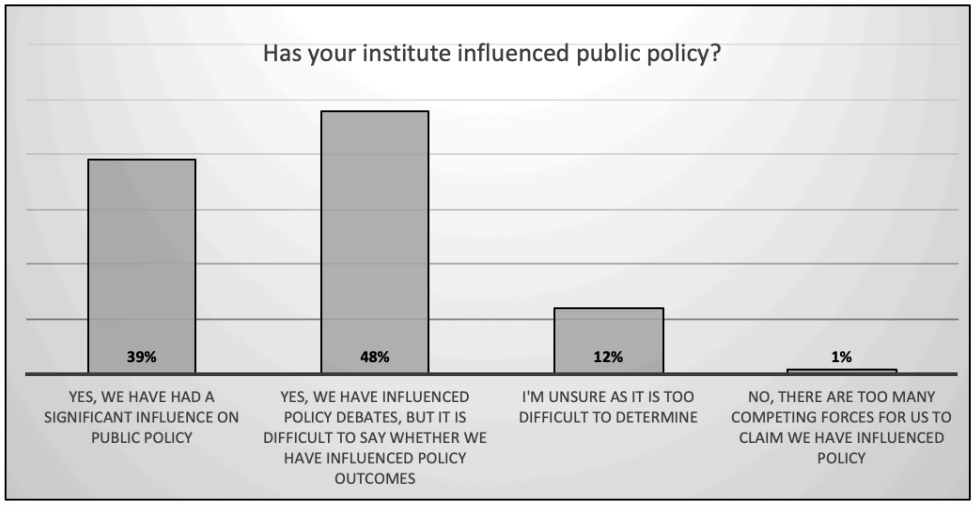
Chapter Seven examined how think tanks seek to influence public policy. But do these institutes believe that their efforts are successful? According to original survey data, overwhelmingly yes. Think tanks have few doubts about their importance in the policy process, and many actively cultivate a perception of materiality. This declaration might seem axiomatic, but there is considerable nuance in how think tanks perceive their influence and its manifestation.

This thesis has demonstrated that think tanks are effective marketers of their ideas. They carefully select their methods and opportunistically insert themselves into the policy process. They are similarly adept at promoting success (consistent with Rich, 2004). For example, websites frequently highlight policy 'impact', and infographics commonly demonstrate 'reach' (statistical measures of penetration or readership). The range of measures used to illustrate think tanks' visibility and target audience penetration has expanded significantly in the digital era. Historically, think tanks pointed to media citations, parliamentary testimonies, and Hansard citations, amongst other measures, to demonstrate their prominence (consistent with Rich, 2004, and Abelson, 2009). The present era affords think tanks additional opportunities to promote their eminence and to allude to their indirect influence (for example, by identifying their follower and subscriber numbers, highlighting report downloads, counting re-tweets, and disclosing web page views).

To be sure, these metrics are mostly used to create the impression of accomplishment rather than laying claims to influence. Survey data support these observations. Think tank survey participants were asked how one could best infer their influence. The most frequent response was 'the *observable* policy impact of [their] work', where nearly 40 per cent 'strongly agreed' (and a further 48 per cent 'agreed'). On the other hand, the two least supported responses were 'the number of social media followers' they attract and the 'number of visits to [their] website' (a combined 35 per cent and 30 per cent respectively 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed'). Most think tanks do not develop fallacious interpretations regarding assessments of policy influence. Instead, most think tanks believe that their policy impact is observable, which they believe dependably demonstrates their policy influence.

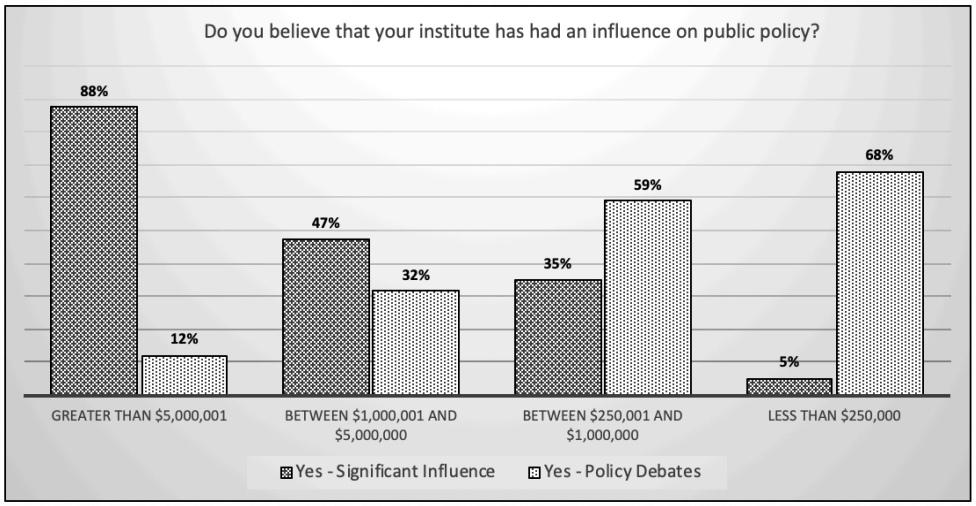
Figure 8.1 strikingly illustrates the point. Thirty-nine per cent of all think tank survey respondents assert that they '*have had a significant influence on public policy'*. Cross-tabulating these responses with annual expense data (a proxy for size) further illuminates the results. Figure 8.2 shows that entities with larger budgets are more likely (than those with smaller budgets) to assert that they have a '*significant influence'* on public policy. Entities with larger budgets are also less likely to identify an influence on '*policy debates'* than those with smaller budgets. Once again, the level of resources is decisive.[153] Institutes with the financial capacity to hire expert researchers and engage audiences through multiple methods believe they more directly influence public policy. Conversely, entities with fewer resources believe they influence the policy environment by persuading debates.

Figure 8-1: Think tank influence perceptions (by percentage of population)



[153] The results in Figure 8.2 have a p-value of 0.0374.

Figure 8-2: Think tank influence perceptions by size (budget)



Most policy institutes are not content simply *knowing* (or perceiving) that they play an influential role in the policy process – they want it *known* that they are influential. Think tanks communicate their self-determined policy influence through various means, but it is particularly common to identify this supposed impact through subscriber emails and social media posts. This study examined these digital sources for a sample of entities from the think tank population.[154] It was found that think tanks regularly identify perceived success and routinely note the conformity of political announcements (and policy change) to their advocacy of particular ideas and proposals.[155] However, the messages rarely incorporate supporting evidence for these influence claims. This is not to say that the claims lack merit, but they hint at linearity and universally ignore the contributions of other protagonists.

[154] Subscriber emails were monitored throughout this thesis for all think tanks providing such services, as were the Twitter and Facebook pages of think tanks with a presence on those platforms.

[155] For example, in one subscriber email, the Grattan Institute cited its policy influence on childcare for women, aged care reforms, social housing, and school tutoring programs (Wood, 2021b). See also Twitter posts from the Mitchell Institute (2019), Per Capita (2019a), USSC (2019), CIS (2019a), Prosper Australia (2019), and Committee for Sydney (2019). Additionally, see the (very early) influence claims from the newly founded Blueprint Institute (2021b).

Policy institutes commonly present their influence claims as 'wins'. The terminology implies that the institute can take (at least some) credit for the policy occurrence, thereby validating its contentions of issue authoritativeness. Such claims also grease the wheels of the fundraising wagon. For example, The Australia Institute claimed 'two big wins' for its energy policy work in July 2020, while at the same time highlighting their engagement with billionaire progressive Mike Cannon-Brookes (TAI, 2020c).[156] Progressive think tank Per Capita claimed a 'big win' when the ALP confirmed it would vote against the 'Stage Three' tax cuts in the Coalition's 2019 tax plan (Dawson, 2019a). One week later, the classically liberal Centre for Independent Studies claimed an 'intellectual victory' for the passage of the *same* plan (Switzer, 2019). In all three examples, the influence pronouncements support the call for donations to encourage similarly influential work.

There are certain metrics that encourage the perception of think tank policy relevance. For example, some think tank executives identify *Hansard* citations as a way to discern their policy contributions.[157] But a great deal of caution is required in this regard: citations need to be individually examined to determine their pertinence. This study searched the Parliament of Australia *Hansard* for references to all ninety-three policy institutes included in this study. Table 8.1 documents *Hansard's* ten most-cited policy institutes.[158] As expected, government-affiliated entities dominate the table. Still, the Productivity Commission citation numbers are extraordinary, indicating the pre-eminent role of this organisation as a policy contributor. Equal in terms of its pre-eminence, the Grattan Institute dominates the table for unaffiliated institutes.

[156] The Australian Financial Review's *Rich List 2021* identifies Mike Cannon-Brookes (Co-CEO of Atlassian) as Australia's third-richest person, with a net worth exceeding $20 billion (Bailey and Sprague, 2021).

[157] Both Peter Jennings from ASPI and Emma Dawson from Per Capita reference the value of being on-the-record in *Hansard* reports (interviews, 2019).

[158] This Hansard search was performed on March 6 and 7, 2020. The search interval was January 1, 2010, until March 6, 2020. Each search included the full name of the entity and common acronyms used to denote that entity (Parliament of Australia, 2020a).

Table 8-1: Think tank federal Hansard citations, 2010-2020 (number of citations)

Entity	Citations
Productivity Commission	5848
Australian Human Rights Commission	1194
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	1177
Australian Law Reform Commission	1062
Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics	716
Grattan Institute	604
The Australia Institute	562
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	373
Australian Institute of Family Studies	357
Institute of Public Affairs	310

Hansard citations also highlight the work of some lesser-known think tanks, demonstrating the pervasiveness of think tank policy engagement. For example, Future Directions International (FDI) was cited a skimpy six times over the search interval, but two of those were commendatory references by then-Foreign Minister Julie Bishop. This particular case offers support for Halpin and Fraussen's (2017, p. 724) assertion that the 'kind' of political engagement matters, not just the 'degree'. Future Directions International is not a prominent institute but has been able to attract the attention of senior public officials through the production of policy-relevant research.

The isolated appraisal of aggregate *Hansard* citations can be misleading without sufficient scrutiny. A high citation count might encourage the perception that an institute reliably produces ideas and prescriptions worthy of reference in parliament. But that conclusion would be mistaken. Demonstrating the point, the Institute of Public Affairs has been referenced in the Parliament of Victoria *Hansard* two hundred times over the past two decades.[159,160] However, sixty of these references originate from ALP party members. An inspection of these particular *Hansard* references yields no surprise – they are almost universally hostile. The point is clear: claims and perceptions of influence require detailed analysis to verify their veracity. Measures such as *Hansard* citations simply serve as inputs to a more thorough process.

[159] The functionality of the Parliament of Australia *Hansard* website is basic, making it difficult to inspect individual entity references. The advanced functionality on the Parliament of Victoria *Hansard* website allows for the ready inspection of individual citations and was thus used in this examination.

[160] The search interval here stretched from March 12, 1991, until March 7, 2020 (Parliament of Victoria, 2020). The search date was March 7, 2020.

The remaining sections of this chapter assess the convergence of think tank influence claims with elite audience perceptions of that influence.

8.5 Journalist Perceptions

Policy institutes and the print media have an agreeable relationship. Newspapers have an ongoing demand for expert copy but are disinclined to pay for content (interview with Gittins, 2020). At the same time, many think tanks seek to inform or influence a public audience and require an efficient conduit to do so. The complementarity of these objectives leaves journalists well-positioned to assess the 'cut-through' of think tank ideas.

In this study, survey data reveals that newspaper journalists substantially concur with think tank executives regarding think tank influence. Twenty-nine per cent of journalist participants believe that '*think tanks influence policymaking'* and a further 68 per cent believe that '*think tanks influence policy debates, but it is difficult to say whether they influence policy outcomes*.' Not a single journalist responded negatively.[161,162] Viewed in isolation, these survey results overwhelmingly support the notion that think tanks, at a minimum, influence policy debates.

But journalist perceptions are not so clear-cut when triangulating survey results with interview responses. Interviews uncovered varying interpretations of the manifestation of think tank influence. For example, the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Ross Gittins contends that think tanks primarily buttress the views of the 'tribe' most closely associated with those views – something he interprets as constituting influence. Gittins insists that think tanks 'reinforce the wisdom of what [people have] always believed' (interview, 2020). This point is well made. Existing ideas recycled in a fresh context can be as impactful as the production of original ideas (Drezner, 2017, p. 36). Phillip Coorey of the *Australian Financial Review* (*AFR*) aligns with Gittins, but in adopting an outcome-oriented lens does not see think tanks achieving their ultimate goal. Says Coorey: 'I think they just reflect pre-existing views. I don't think they have a huge amount of influence on policy' (interview with Coorey, 2020).[163]

[161] The remaining 3 per cent of respondents say they are '*unsure; it is too difficult to determine*'.

[162] These results might incorporate bias. Journalists were selected for this study based on their references to think tanks in their published articles. These journalists might therefore be positively disposed to the perceived value and influence of think tank ideas.

[163] Coorey does caveat his comments, suggesting that party-affiliated institutes 'can help influence policymaking inside those parties' (interview, 2020).

Interestingly, these journalist observations neatly reconcile with the musings of the IPA's John Roskam. In discussing the IPA's influence, Roskam proposes that 'sometimes our research can be used by policymakers to change their thinking completely – sometimes it confirms an existing bias' (interview, 2019). Facilitating confirmation bias is not a goal typically identified by policy institutes. It likely occurs without intention or concentrated effort. Nevertheless, presenting evidence in support of existing beliefs serves great purpose. In their study on the information-seeking motivations of liberals and conservatives in the United States, Frimer et al. (2017) demonstrate the seductiveness of selective exposure to 'belief-confirming information.' The authors assert that this selective exposure allows people to avoid intellectually threatening ideas (see also Fielding et al., 2012, p. 714). Adapting these findings, think tanks effectively seek to circumvent the contest of ideas when confirming the biases of a known audience. Ensuring ideologically congruent individuals remain devout via influential, belief-confirming content is, for some, as important as producing original ideas. As Gittins puts it, 'think tanks are about keeping the faithful, faithful' (interview, 2020).

Journalists that focus on a specific policy field perceive think tank influence in a more traditional sense. The depth of analysis, and evidence base supporting that analysis, is of primary importance to these journalists. Tim Dodd, the Higher Education Editor at *The Australian*, posits that both the Grattan Institute and the Mitchell Institute are 'demonstrably' influential in his discipline (interview, 2020). Dodd's perceptions are substantially shaped by the rigour of these think tanks' research which, in turn, is regarded as credible by his readers.

More broadly, journalists assert that the expertise demonstrated through evidence-based research is crucial to publishing decisions (interviews with Dingwall, 2020; McIlroy, 2020; Visontay, 2020). It is certainly the case that think tank opinion pieces are prevalent in Australian newspapers (see, for example, Dawson, 2020; Flake, 2020; Young, 2020; Fullilove, 2021; Jackman, 2021; Medcalf, 2021; Oquist, 2021; Roskam, 2021; L. Smith, 2021; Switzer, 2021; Wood, 2021a). But these op-ed. pieces are distinct from journalist-authored articles. The personal credibility of issue-focussed journalists depends upon the substance and utility of the articles they author, and they are therefore discerning when it comes to sources and evidence.[164] This theme consistently emerged from interviews. Tom McIlroy from the *Australian Financial Review* summarises these sentiments by asserting that think tanks 'add

[164] Noting that this might not always be the case.

credibility and specialist knowledge – [but] I don't want to put someone in the newspaper without justification' (interview, 2020). The credibility McIlroy references comes from issue expertise and from narratives created by think tanks around relevance and influence. ASPI's Peter Jennings clearly expresses the benefits of carefully managing the perceptions of his institute's expertise and effectiveness: 'to be frank, politicians are interested in me because they see me on TV or writing for newspapers: that's something that politicians care about' (interview, 2019).

Distinguished institutes

This study's original survey asked journalists to identify up to three policy institutes they believe have influenced public policy.[165] Almost all journalists obliged, resulting in one-hundred-and-sixty-one nominations (an average of 2.9 nominations per respondent). Nevertheless, the number of uniquely identified think tanks was quite narrow – only nineteen in total. Table 8.2 presents the top ten identified entities.

Table 8-2: Journalist-identified think tanks (by number of nominations)

Entity	Orientation	Journalist Identified
Grattan Institute	Centrist	37
Institute of Public Affairs	Right	30
The Australia Institute	Left	29
Lowy Institute	Centrist	17
The Centre for Independent Studies	Right	13
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	Centrist	8
Menzies Research Centre	Right	4
Per Capita	Left	3
Mitchell Institute	Left	2
Regional Australia Institute	Centrist	2
McKell Institute	Left	2

The list yields few surprises regarding the constituents, although the concentration at the top is noteworthy. There is a dramatic erosion in the count beyond the top three. Illustrating this dominance, over half of the survey respondents identified *all* of the top three entities. The list is otherwise well balanced between centrist, left- and right-leaning institutes (four, four, and three, respectively). Both university- and party-affiliated institutes are identified alongside the autonomous institute majority (although no government-affiliated

[165] The survey text incorporated Domhoff's (1967) influence definition.

entities were nominated, perhaps reflecting the definitional interpretations of the participants). The top six institutes are all large and enjoy the benefits of well-resourced research teams. The top three, however, most aggressively pursue their ideas and beliefs with a public audience (in addition to an elite audience). It is little wonder they dominate journalists' thoughts when it comes to perceptions of influence.

In sum, print-media journalists mostly concur that think tanks exert influence on public policy. However, the manifestation of that influence is conceived of in different ways, with some journalists submitting that think tanks impact public opinion despite questioning the originality of their intellectual contributions.

8.6 Parliamentarian Perceptions[166]

For many think tanks, parliamentarians ('those who control from a position of authority')[167] are the ultimate targets of influence.[168] This is not universally the case as some institutes more keenly focus their efforts on the government bureaucracy (amongst other audiences) rather than elected politicians. As such, parliamentarian perceptions will matter to many think tanks, but certainly not all.

Parliamentarian perceptions of think tank influence (whether that influence is on the public, or parliamentarians themselves) are important because it affects how these parliamentarians engage with think tank outputs. For example, parliamentarians might use think tank contributions for policy legitimation or to enlighten policy formulation, depending on the perceived influence and utility of think tank offerings.

Elected politicians (like others) have their perceptions shaped by their engagement with a think tank's products. Parliamentarians underwhelmed by the experience are less likely to engage with that think tank's products going forward. This negative feedback enfeebles think tank efforts from the outset, thus demonstrating the need for penetrating products and ideas fashioned in a relevant style. Some policy institutes therefore produce multiple versions of one piece of work to appeal to different audiences. For example, the Productivity Commission releases up to four different versions of its reports to ensure it effectively communicates its

[166] 'Parliamentarians' refers to those in federal parliament only, as outlined in Chapter Three.
[167] See Domhoff's (1967, p. 11) full definition of influence in Chapter Four.
[168] Chapter Four details the conceptualisation of 'policymakers' used in this thesis. Parliamentarians represent 'official policymakers', while 'supplementary policymakers' are those who 'operate on the basis of authority granted by others' (Anderson, 2011, p. 48). This section focusses on the perceptions of 'official policymakers.'

ideas with different audiences (interview with Lattimore, 2019). The Commission's reports for experts in the bureaucracy might be different from those provided to time-challenged parliamentarians.

Think tanks structure their offerings based on the nature of their target audience and their policy cycle intentions (that is, whether they seek to define issues and set agendas or impact policy formulation and implementation). Chapter Seven also proposed that left-leaning parliamentarians tend to favour evidence-based policy proposals, whereas right-leaning parliamentarians – albeit more mixed – tend to favour values-based propositions.[169] It follows that perceptions of think tank policy influence might also divide along ideological lines. Original survey data supports this supposition.

In aggregate, parliamentarian respondents are even more inclined than print-media journalists to believe that think tanks 'have an influence on public policy'.[170] Fully 40 per cent of parliamentarians believe '*think tanks have an influence on policymaking'*, and a further 51 per cent believe '*think tanks influence policy debates but it is difficult to say whether they influence policy outcomes*.'[171] But the breakdown by political party is revealing.

Table 8-3: Parliamentarian influence perceptions (by Party)

Survey Response	Total	Coalition	ALP	Other
Yes, I believe think tanks influence policymaking	40.0%	20.0%	48.0%	37.5%
Yes, think tanks influence policy debates, but it is difficult to say whether they influence policy outcomes	51.0%	60.0%	44.5%	62.5%
I'm unsure; it is too difficult to determine	4.5%	0%	7.5%	0%
No, there are too many competing forces for any one organisation to have an influence	4.5%	20.0%	0%	0%
No, think tanks are not relevant in policymaking	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 8.3 shows that 48 per cent of ALP parliamentarians believe that think tanks '*have an influence on public policy'*, whereas only 20 per cent of Coalition respondents believe the same. Sixty per cent of Coalition respondents instead believe that '*think tanks influence policy*

[169] Left-leaning parliamentarians include those from the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Greens.
[170] The survey text incorporated Domhoff's (1967) definition of influence.
[171] Of the remaining respondents, 4.5 per cent state that they are '*unsure; it is too difficult to determine*', and 4.5 per cent say '*no, there are too many competing forces for any one organisation to have an influence*'.

debates but it is difficult to say whether they influence policy outcomes' (versus 44 per cent for ALP respondents). Only Coalition participants (20 per cent) respond negatively. The data point to the fragility of generalisations about the think tank industry. Not only is there great variation in think tank types and styles, there is also a notable divergence in how their audiences perceive their relevance and utility.

Interview data evidence left-leaning parliamentarians' constructive posture regarding think tank influence (supporting the survey data inferences).[172] Asked whether think tanks are relevant and can influence policymaking, one left-leaning respondent is emphatic: 'Absolutely. Very significantly.' (Anonymous Interviewee I, 2020). Says another, think tanks 'definitely […] play an important role and I certainly am drawn to [their] work' (Anonymous Interviewee M, 2020). But conservative parliamentarians are apparently less convinced, with one interviewee (not in isolation) particularly sceptical:

> In general, you're going to get a more bearish outlook from Coalition MPs, who are generally suspicious of these third-party entities – these so-called experts essentially […] I don't think think tanks play a large role – certainly [not] on our side of politics. […] Politicians don't read these reports from think tanks at all. I'm quite bearish about the role they play and their relevance (Anonymous Interviewee N, 2020).

This perception gap closely connects to parliamentarians' motivations when they wield think tank ideas. Coupled with the disparate preferences regarding scholarship style (value- or evidenced-based), political parties appear to gravitate toward particular applications of think tank ideation. Interview data suggest that left-leaning parliamentarians – consistent with their perceptions of think tank influence – see policy institutes as valuable sources of evidence-based policy ideas and proposals, guiding them in policy formulation. Multiple left-leaning interviewees point out that think tanks help them to 'develop policies, to test ideas, and also to have a voice' (Anonymous Interviewee O, 2020). Anonymous Interviewee T (2021) asserts that 'Labor tends to have a more policy-heavy agenda […] and many of those ideas are informed by work done at think tanks.' Another progressive participant provides extended commentary:

> We certainly appreciate the work that they do and the papers that they put to us. And if they're well done, if they're well researched, if they're about a particular issue that's

[172] This study interviewed seventeen federal parliamentarians. The total included seven Coalition parliamentarians, seven from the ALP, and three cross-benchers.

> topical and one that's important to Australians, then we certainly use it in our policy formulation (Anonymous Interviewee J, 2020).

On the other hand, Coalition parliamentarians more often distinguish think tanks as policy and idea *legitimators* (in the public sphere) rather than influential idea *generators* (Anonymous Interviewee K, 2020; Anonymous Interviewee N, 2020; Anonymous Interviewee P, 2020). In other words, parliamentarians on the left believe that think tanks influence their audiences (including parliamentarians themselves) through their creativity; their ideation. Those on the right more commonly suggest that think tanks simply support and validate their existing proposals.

Data triangulation strengthens the inferences regarding the influence perceptions of left-leaning parliamentarians. But it is less conclusive on the conservative side. The data mostly indicate that Coalition parliamentarians are sceptical of think tank influence on policy deliberations, despite some declaring that think tanks occasionally influence their policy views. This minority group values think tank contributions that privilege an *evidence* base, and they are encouraged by the potential impact of the newly-established, right-leaning Blueprint Institute, which seeks to inform policy through 'evidenced-based' research (on evidence-based policy, see Head, 2015; Blueprint, 2021a).[173] Two right-leaning (moderate) parliamentarians enthusiastically welcome Blueprint's entry:

> Blueprint will arguably actually carry quite a lot of influence in some sections of the Liberal Party, and it's emerging as a more moderate, centrist think tank to almost counter an IPA on the right of the spectrum (Anonymous Interviewee Q, 2020).

> Yes. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I think there's a crying need for it; not only is there room for it, there's a crying need for it (Anonymous Interviewee P, 2020).

Again, the analysis here requires caution. Centrist institutes producing evidence-based policy research are demonstrably relevant to both sides of politics. For example, the Grattan Institute, Lowy Institute, AHURI and the Productivity Commission would rightly reject the suggestion that right-leaning parliamentarians do not welcome their work. These institutes wholly rely on evidence-based research to service and influence their target audiences – as do indeed the majority of think tanks. AHURI and the Productivity Commission would also point out that their research does not target politicians per se. Governmental departments and

[173] The Blueprint Institute was established in 2020 and, as such, was not a part of this inquiry's original think tank count.

agencies are their primary targets. Thus, elected politicians might not be directly cognisant of the broader influence of their work.

These inferences need to be contextualised with the Chapter Seven discussion on the relative resources and requirements of the governing party (presently, the right-leaning Coalition) versus those of the opposition (presently, the left-leaning ALP). It might be the case that think tanks' utility and the perceptions of their influence evolve with changes in the governing party. Notwithstanding, this section shows that different respondent groups perceive think tank influence in different ways. Coalition parliamentarians tend to see think tanks playing a role in setting agendas and shaping debates (or otherwise legitimating policy proposals). The Labor Party and Greens concur but also see think tanks influencing policy formulation.

Distinguished institutes

Like journalists, this study's survey asked parliamentarians to identify policy institutes that they consider to be influential. Fourteen unique entities were identified across thirty-six individual responses (resulting in one-hundred nominations). Table 8.4 details the majority of the identified institutes.[174]

Table 8-4: Parliamentarian-identified think tanks (by number of nominations)

Entity	Orientation	Politician Identified
The Australia Institute	Left	25
Grattan Institute	Centrist	22
Institute of Public Affairs	Right	19
Lowy Institute	Centrist	9
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	Centrist	6
Per Capita	Left	4
Chifley Research Centre	Left	4
The Centre for Independent Studies	Right	3
Menzies Research Centre	Right	2
CEDA	Centrist	1
McKell Institute	Left	1
Curtin Research Centre	Centrist	1

The three most-identified think tanks match those identified by journalists, but in a different order. The results are potentially impacted by the higher response rate of ALP-

[174] Table 8.4 references ninety-seven nominations. The remaining three nominations are not in this study's think tank population.

affiliated participants, in addition to parliamentarians' fundamental perceptions of think tank influence. Overall though, the lists are remarkably similar in constituency and concentration. Parliamentarians and journalists largely agree on which institutes they believe play a discernible role in the policy process.

8.7 Summary

Think tanks primarily seek to 'sway, persuade, or otherwise have an effect upon' public policy. This chapter examines the claims and perceptions of this supposed influence. These perceptions are important because they impact broader understandings of relevance and are also crucial for funding sustenance. If the public goods think tanks proffer are not deemed valuable, then the institutes providing these 'assets' are less likely to survive.

The chapter demonstrates that influence claims are common, and elite audiences mostly concur that think tanks are influential. The perceived incarnation of this influence varies, spanning bias-confirmation to policy formulation. Journalists and parliamentarians have similar views regarding the most influential think tanks, but right-leaning parliamentarians commonly diverge from those on the left by often expressing scepticism about think tank influence. These views are not expressed in unison, but they are unique to the right. No left-leaning parliamentarians express similar sentiments.

More decisive inferences would be imprudent here due to sample size constraints. Still, the data are consistent across surveys and interviews, and there is little contrary evidence that challenge the postulations. One thing is clear: while think tank scholarship routinely presents politicians as a homogenous group and one which uniformly reacts to think tank propositions, the evidence does not support that notion here. Chapter Twelve discusses this important inference in further detail.

This thesis has so far demonstrated that think tanks are prevalent and prominent. They have the desire to influence and the capacity to influence. They are also perceived to be influential by their primary audiences. But are they? This central research question remains unanswered, and in the absence of detailed case analyses, assertions of influence remain conjecture. Part Three of this thesis examines three specific cases to determine whether they sustain claims and perceptions of think tank influence.

Part Three

Preface

Chapter Three introduced this study's analytical framework and the methods used to assess the role and influence of think tanks on selected policy issues. This preface further details the case selection process.

To briefly recap, this thesis leverages the Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework to assess an individual think tank's influence on a selected policy issue. The selected issue may have simply attracted political attention, or it might have become a political priority, or even a policy priority. The framework helps to evaluate the relevant think tank's role and impact on this policy evolution. The modified Shiffman and Smith (2007) analytical framework and the evolved-status taxonomy (both from Chapter Three) are reproduced here for convenience.

Table P1: Analytical framework

Dimension	Description	Factors impacting actors' policy influence
Issue Characteristics	Features of the debate or issue	1. Credible indicators: clear measures that show the severity of the problem, and can be used to monitor progress 2. Severity: the size of the burden relative to other problems, as indicated by objective measures 3. Effective interventions: the extent to which the proposed means of addressing the problem are clearly explained, cost effective, backed by evidence, and implementable
Political Context	The political environment in which actors operate	4. Policy windows: political moments when conditions align favourably for an issue solution, presenting opportunities for advocates to influence decisionmakers 5. Governance structures: the degree to which norms and institutions operating in a sector provide a platform for effective action
Actor Power	The strengths of the individuals and organisations concerned with the issue	6. Policy community cohesion: the degree of coalescence among the network of individuals and organisations that are centrally involved with the issue 7. Leadership: the presence of individuals capable of uniting the policy community and acknowledged as particularly strong champions for the cause 8. Guiding institutions: the effectiveness of organisations or coordinating mechanisms with a mandate to lead the initiative 9. Civil society mobilisation: the extent to which grassroots organisations have mobilised to press political authorities to address the issue
Ideas	The ways in which those involved with the issue understand and portray it	10. Internal frame: the degree to which the policy community agrees on the definition of, causes of, and solutions to the problem 11. External frame: public portrayals of the issue in ways that indirectly resonate with political authorities

Table P2: Evolved status taxonomy

		Evolved status of policy issue		
		Political attention	Political priority	Policy priority
Think tank influence	Political attention			
	Political priority			
	Policy priority			

There is no intention to use the framework to inductively develop a theory or test a hypothesis. Rather, the framework encourages an evidence-based examination of think tank influence claims and assesses the conditions that facilitate influence. The framework assesses the factors that facilitate influence across four distinct dimensions: issue characteristics, political context, the power of actors, and the proffered ideas. These dimensions are examined through process-tracing, with semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis the primary data-collection methods.

Each dimension plays an important role in determining think tank influence, but some dimensions might be more important in a particular case than others. More broadly, the contention here is that it is insufficient to simply assess the strength of think tank ideas and the correlation between those ideas and the evolved status of a policy issue. A systematic examination across a range of dimensions provides greater rigour and facilitates more robust inferences.

The case studies first assess the characteristics of the policy issues and the associated political contexts. More simply, these dimensions consider whether the environment was conducive to consequential think tank engagement (in a similar way, see Ricci, 1993, p. 193). The cases then appraise the power of the associated actors. The purpose here is to determine whether it was feasible (and realistic) for the relevant think tank to influence the policy debate given the stature and role of other actors. The final step assesses the penetration and impact of the relevant think tank's ideas. This section assesses the cut-through of the think tank's intellectual propositions and determines whether those ideas attracted policymaker attention and elicited a policymaker response. Each case proceeds across this same sequential format.

The Cases

The semi-structured interviews conducted in strand two invited think tank participants to identify issues on which they purportedly exerted influence. Thirty-one of the forty-one unique think tank interviewees volunteered such cases. Some think tanks proffered more than

one case, resulting in a forty-one-case universe. All types of think tanks provided exemplars, variously asserting that they set agendas, framed debates, or contributed to policy formulation. Appendix F details the full case list.

The screening criteria detailed in Section 3.6.3 enabled the identification of seventeen 'highly qualified' candidate cases (as part of the stage-one screening process).[175] The second part of the screening process distinguished three cases from this narrower list based on the significance and representativeness of the policy issues and the credibility of the influence claims.[176] Table P3 provides summary information on the three selected cases.

Table P3: Part Three Case Studies

Entity	Issue	Political Arena	Period / Year	Think Tank Scholars
Centre for Independent Studies	Child protection and adoption	State (NSW)	2009 - 2015	Jeremy Sammut
Grattan Institute	School funding	Federal	2017	Peter Goss; Julie Sonnemann
Lowy Institute	Diplomatic deficit	International	2009 (ongoing)	Multiple

The think tanks central to each case have a resource base that facilitates the development of influence capacities. Thus, the influence of the think tank's ideas should substantially depend upon their utility. Other organisational characteristics should not impede the think tank's effectiveness (notwithstanding the myriad of external factors that require consideration).

To reiterate, the three policy cases have been chosen based on the issue's features and the strength of the accompanying influence claims. The involvement of a specific institute was not a primary determinant. An unplanned feature of the chosen cases is that each is associated with a distinct policy arena: the CIS case focuses on state politics, the Grattan Institute case engages federal politics, and the Lowy Institute case centres on international affairs. Therefore, the cases provide the opportunity to comprehensively appraise Australian think tanks' influence across a range of settings.

The ensuing three chapters test the veracity of the think tank influence claims. To be clear, the chapters are not normatively disposed. They do not challenge the merits of the think tanks' ideas (or those of any other actor), and they do not prosecute the policies proposed,

[175] All cases were rated 'High', 'Medium', or 'Low' based on their conformity to the screening criteria.
[176] All 'highly qualified' cases contain credible claims, but the chosen cases particularly stood out across the criteria.

adopted or implemented by the government. The chapters strictly focus on an assessment of the influences on policy.

Chapter Nine: NSW Child Protection and Adoption Laws

9.1 Introduction

In two separate incidents in 2007, children who were 'known' to New South Wales (NSW) child protection authorities were murdered by their parents. The deaths of two-year-old Dean Shillingsworth and seven-year-old 'Ebony' caused public outrage and triggered a comprehensive review of NSW child protection services.[177] The Liberal Party of NSW subsequently instituted a series of controversial reforms following their election in March 2011.

The incidents understandably attracted broad attention. Think tank scholar Dr Jeremy Sammut from the right-leaning Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) was one of the many dismayed by the events. Sammut, who had not previously written on child protection, recalls in stark terms his motivation to intellectually engage on the issue:

> This girl [Ebony] was hiding in plain sight and the [Department of Community Services] basically did nothing while she died. And that offended me. That just offended me. This, for me, was an example of where you needed someone who was prepared to call out the bullshit […]. It's about kids, it's about fairness, it's about opportunity, it's about all the things the Left loves to bleed about, and I found out that it was this morass of, basically, lies, ideology and politics (interview with Sammut, 2020b).

Sammut embarked on a personal 'crusade' to debase the 'orthodox' thinking he observed in incumbent child protection systems (interview with Sammut, 2020b). He adjudged the system to be 'fatally flawed' and aggressively advocated an alternate approach (Sammut, 2009a). According to Sammut, the root cause of the systemic defects derived from the privileging of family preservation over the rights and safety of children.

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the extent to which the Centre for Independent Studies, almost solely through its scholar Jeremy Sammut, influenced the evolution of NSW's child protection and local adoption laws. The period under analysis stretches from 2007, shortly before the CIS first published on the issue, until 2018, when the CIS completed its final

[177] Dean Shillingsworth was murdered by his mother on October 11, 2007. 'Ebony' – the child's middle name – was starved by her parents and died on November 3, 2007 (Barbour, 2009a, 2009b).

piece on the topic. The analysis skews toward the earlier years of CIS's involvement (2009-2014), as the reform process' first – and most challenging – steps commenced with the election of the NSW Liberal government in March 2011.

The chapter finds that the CIS exerted considerable influence on the reform process, specifically at the agenda-setting and issue definition stages of the policy cycle. Although several actors pursued similarly fashioned reforms, the CIS was the dominant voice in the public sphere from a research and publication perspective (over this period). The CIS's provocative arguments played a substantial role in prompting formal and philosophical changes to the NSW government's child protection and adoption framework.

9.2 Methods

This chapter is informed by eleven semi-structured interviews and primary and secondary document examination. All interviews used the Zoom video-conferencing platform and occurred between September and November 2020. In addition to Jeremy Sammut (from the CIS), the interviews included representatives from child welfare NGOs, current and former government officials and bureaucrats, and university experts in the field of child protection and adoption.[178]

The chapter identifies nine of the eleven interviewees, although two remain anonymous. The average interview length was forty-seven minutes with a standard deviation of thirteen minutes. The study used the snowball technique to identify interviewees, the first of which was Jeremy Sammut.

9.3 Centre for Independent Studies: Background

The Centre for Independent Studies was founded in 1976 by high school mathematics teacher Greg Lindsay. Lindsay served as the Centre's Executive Director for forty-two years before stepping down in 2018 (CIS, 2021). The Centre's foundations rest on classical liberal and libertarian ideas, which advocate for small government, free markets, and individual freedoms across a diverse range of social and economic issues.

The CIS is a 'prominent' institute – one of the seven that Chapter Four formally identifies. It is one of two institutes that dominate the intellectual landscape on the philosophical right

[178] Sammut's employment with the CIS ended in early 2020.

(along with the IPA), and it unreservedly publicises its 'widespread influence on public affairs' (CIS, 2021). Scholar Jeremy Sammut joined the CIS in June 2007 and had formerly completed a PhD at Monash University (Sammut, 2003).[179] Sammut subsequently became the Director of the Culture, Prosperity and Civil Society Program at the Centre and, as such, was primarily responsible for all content on child protection and adoption (CIS, 2020b).

This chapter demonstrates the importance of sophisticated individual scholars. There is no doubt that the CIS's profile initially enabled Sammut to attract the attention of elite audiences (in the media and politics). But it was Sammut's individual doggedness that bullied this issue. This was an otherwise solo venture away from the enabling effect of the CIS's generous resource base.

9.4 Child Protection and Adoption in Australia

9.4.1 Issue Characteristics

The statutory protection of Australian children falls under the authority of state and territory governments (AIHW, 2020a). The CIS therefore directed its efforts toward state politics – most particularly in NSW, where the CIS is based. Children in NSW who are neglected or exposed to abusive parents are subject to statutory removal under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)*. After an assessment by the Department of Family and Community Services, a child may be placed into 'out-of-home' care should that child be deemed in 'need of care and protection' (NSW Government, 1998, Section 34:1).

The NSW government defines out-of-home care as 'residential care and control of a child or young person that is provided by a person other than the parent of the child or young person, and at a place other than the usual home of the child or young person' (NSW Government, 1998, Section 135:1). There were 44,900 children in out-of-home care in Australia as of June 30, 2019, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2020a, p. v).[180] Importantly, 29 per cent of these children had been in such placements for two to five years, and 38 per cent had been in out-of-home care for more than five years

[179] Sammut's thesis is entitled '*The quest for civic virtue: citizenship and politics in federal Australia'.*
[180] Sammut reports that there were 31,166 children in out-of-home care in 2008 (Sammut, 2009a, p. vii).

(AIHW, 2019, p. 55).[181] Further, approximately 38 per cent of all Australian children in out-of-home care were in NSW (AIHW, 2020a, p. 48).

The focus in child protection systems has been on achieving permanency (at least in more recent times). The AIHW states that the aim of permanency is to 'maintain or establish meaningful connections with other caring adults in the child's life such as family, friends, and the community' (AIHW, 2020a, p. 64). The priority of permanency is to reunite children with their birth parents at an appropriate – but earliest possible – time. This privileging of reunification is broadly referred to as family preservation. Other permanency options include guardianship, kinship care, or open adoption.

Adoption is the legal transfer of a child to adoptive parents who assume all of the rights and responsibilities of parenting that child on a permanent basis (AIHW, 2019, p. 1).[182] The substantial majority of Australia's adoptions are now 'open', whereby an adopted child has the opportunity to retain contact with their birth parents (and family) to ensure they remain aware of their original background and identity. There were forty-two local adoptions and two-hundred-and-eleven known-child adoptions (that is, adoptions from care) in Australia in 2018-19 – about 0.5 per cent of the total out-of-home care population (AIHW, 2019, pp. 13-14).[183,184] Approximately 78 per cent of all known-child adoptions occurred in NSW (AIHW, 2019, p. 29). Tellingly, adoptions of Australian children (both local and known) fell 60 per cent between 1994-95 and 2018-19 (AIHW, 2019, p. 37).

Aboriginal children are dealt with separately under the *Adoption Act 2000 (NSW)*, but the NSW government has determined that the adoption of Aboriginal children is 'not usually considered suitable' nor is it 'culturally appropriate' (NSW Family & Community Services, 2014, pp. 15-16). Indigenous children are disproportionately represented in the out-of-home care system, numbering approximately 18,000 across Australia (AIHW, 2020a, p. vi).

It is also important to note the NSW government's financial commitment to this policy field. The NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) allocated approximately $2.2 billion for child protection in 2018-19, representing approximately one-third of the total

[181] Sammut reports that approximately 29 per cent of children had been in out-of-home care for over five years in 2008 (Sammut, 2009a, p. vii).
[182] Local adoption in NSW is governed under the *Adoption Act 2000*. The AIHW defines local adoption as 'the adoption of children born or permanently residing in Australia before the adoption who are legally able to be placed for adoption, but generally have had no previous contact with the adoptive parents' (AIHW, 2020b).
[183] A known-child adoption occurs 'where the child is already known to the adoptive parents' (AIHW, 2019).
[184] Sammut reports that there were seventy local adoptions in Australia in 2008 (Sammut, 2009a).

FACS budget (NSW Government, 2019a, pp. 2-2, 2-5). Fifty-five per cent of the FACS budget went to 'support out-of-home care and permanency support, guardianship and adoption' (NSW Government, 2019b).

In brief, there were no particular issue characteristics that would expressly prevent the CIS from influencing this policy debate.

9.4.2 Political Context

Australia's historical experience

Australia's child protection and adoption landscape has been shaped by the country's regrettable history in the field. The forced removal of Indigenous children under government legislation (the 'Stolen Generations') has had an enduring impact on related policy measures. An estimated 20,900 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were forcibly removed from their parents from the beginning of the twentieth century up to 1972 in a failed attempt by authorities to assimilate Indigenous children into white society (AIHW, 2018, pp. 9-10).[185] In response to the consequences of the policy, the former-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued a 'National Apology to the Stolen Generations' on February 13, 2008 (Parliament of Australia, 2008).

Another lamentable chapter in Australia's history was the forced adoption and removal of children born to unwed mothers in the mid-twentieth century. An estimated 140,000-150,000 children were adopted between 1951 and 1975, many of whom were forcibly taken from mostly unmarried women (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012a, pp. 8-10; Higgins, 2012).[186] Many of the adoptions were 'arranged' by hospitals or other child wellbeing-related organisations and were made favouring childless married couples desiring children (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012a, pp. 9-10). The former-Prime Minister Julia Gillard made a 'National Apology for Forced Adoptions' on March 21, 2013, to those impacted by these coerced removal practices (Parliament of Australia, 2013).

Australia's historical experience with child protection and adoption has conspicuously persuaded government policy (at both the state and federal levels). Successive governments

[185] The AIHW note that several jurisdictions repealed legislation in 1972 that had allowed the legal removal of Indigenous children from their parents (AIHW, 2018, p. 4).
[186] The exact number of forced adoptions is difficult to determine due to the lack of data regarding parental consent and the reason for the adoption (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012a, pp. 9-10).

have uniformly expanded family support services and supported the principle of family preservation. These measures seek to prevent the escalation of care-related issues that might result in a care and protection order, which can lead to an out-of-home care placement (NSW Government, 2020b). Family preservation (or reunification) has been a clear priority if an out-of-home care situation arises (AIHW, 2020a, pp. 66, 70). Adoption, on the other hand, has been a last – and usually heavily opposed – option in most states.

The tragic deaths of Dean Shillingsworth and 'Ebony' emboldened those looking to challenge the powerful status quo forces maintaining Australia's child protection systems. In the absence of tragedy, it was improbable that child protection and adoption reforms would climb the legislative agenda. But these combined tragedies raised the salience of the issue. Baumgartner et al. (2009, p. 120) assert that issue salience impacts the degree of friction in the policy process. In the present case, political salience had suddenly surged, and systemic frictions had been diluted: a policy window had opened for those who believed the system required an overhaul (Kingdon, 2011, pp. 165-195).[187]

NSW reforms

Inquiries and inquests have been a regular feature of Australia's child protection field. And reforms to the sector – erratically introduced on a state-by-state basis – have often followed these inquiries. Table 9.1 details several inquiries or inquests relevant to the present case (during the relevant period), emphasising those from NSW.

[187] According to Herweg et al. (2015, p. 444), this policy window could more specifically be classified as an 'agenda window'. Here, the circumstances in the problem stream (an identifiable focusing event) coupled with a change in the national mood (in the political stream) encouraged Sammut's work in the policy stream, which thrust the issue on the policy agenda (Kingdon, 2011; Herweg et al., 2017, p. 26).

Table 9-1: Inquiries and inquests into child protection and adoption

Date Published	Inquiry or Inquest Name	Primary Author	Short Name
November 2008	*Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in* ***NSW***	The Honourable James Wood AO QC	'The Wood Report'
October 2009	*The death of Ebony: The need for an effective interagency response to children at risk*	**NSW** Ombudsman – Bruce Barbour	
December 2009	*The death of Dean Shillingsworth: Critical challenges in the context of reforms to the child protection system*	**NSW** Ombudsman – Bruce Barbour	
April 2015	*Inquest into the Death of Chloe Lee Valentine*	State Coroner, **South Australia** – Mark Johns	
August 2015	*Out of home care*	**Commonwealth** Senate – Community Affairs References Committee	
2016	*Independent Review of Out of Home Care in* ***New South Wales***	David Tune AO PSM	'The Tune Review'
October 2018	*Breaking barriers: a national adoption framework for Australian children*	**Commonwealth** House of Representatives – Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs	'Inquiry into local adoption'

New South Wales has introduced three major child protection reform packages since 2008. First, the Labor government of Nathan Rees 'wholeheartedly welcomed' the *Wood Report* and substantially incorporated Wood's recommendations into its *Keep Them Safe* reform package of March 2009 (NSW Department of Community Services, 2009, p. foreword). The *Wood Report* emphasised the continuing importance of family preservation and did not make mention of adoption (in the relevant context) in the *entirety* of the report.

Second, the Liberal government of Barry O'Farrell initiated a comprehensive review of child protection services following its election in March 2011. This review culminated in a dramatic move away from the traditional child protection model of the prior *Keep Them Safe* package and was operationalised in the *Safe Home for Life* reform package announced in November 2013 (these reforms are central to the present case). The evolution in focus was clear: 'at the heart of these reforms is placing *children* back at the centre of the child protection system […] to really focus on *children's* rights and parental obligations' (NSW Department of Family and Community Services, 2013, pp. 1, italics in original).[188]

[188] The *Child Protection Legislation Amendment Act 2014 (No 8)* formalised the reforms.

In a marked rebalancing, the term 'adoption' appeared two-hundred-and-six times in the *Safe Home for Life* report. In contrast, 'family preservation' appeared only fourteen times (and 'restoration' forty-nine times). The report sought to legitimise open adoption by establishing it as a central component of the reform package. Additionally, the reforms controversially introduced permanency planning rules that limited the amount of time children can spend in out-of-home care before requiring a permanency decision – and adoption became an explicit option in the permanency hierarchy (now the top preference if family restoration or long-term guardianship is not possible) (NSW Department of Family and Community Services, 2013, pp. 24-28).

Third, the Liberal government of Mike Baird (who replaced the resigning-Premier Barry O'Farrell in March 2014) commissioned the *Tune Review* in 2015 to assess the out-of-home care system in NSW. The *Tune Review* informed the whole-of-system reforms implemented in the *Their Futures Matter* package released in 2017 (NSW Family & Community Services, 2017). The reforms focussed on expenditure and outcome accountability and strengthened the government's ability to intervene early to minimise the number of children in out-of-home care. Open adoption and permanency goals remained central components of the package.

9.4.3 Actor Power

The NSW reforms have been both substantial and controversial. In developing the reforms, the NSW Department of Family and Community Services extensively engaged with non-governmental actors who mobilised for and against its plans. It is important to identify these actors to account for rival explanations for the policy changes (Yin, 2014, p. 141).

The dominant external actors generally coalesced around one of two sides of the child protection debate. Baumgartner et al. (2009, p. 6) define a 'side' of a debate as a 'set of actors who share a policy goal'. On the side of the status quo – that is, the continued prioritisation of family preservation and a bias toward family support measures to reduce the need for statutory interventions – were the child welfare NGOs, primarily represented in NSW by the peak lobby group Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA). ACWA was established in 1957 and represents over seventy agencies throughout NSW (ACWA, 2020). Invoking the Shiffman and Smith (2007, p. 1371) framework, ACWA represents a powerful industry actor that mobilised to defend the status quo. ACWA 'definitely' opposed most of the *Safe Home for Life* reforms (Anonymous Interviewee E, 2020).

The majority of academic scholars also supported the status quo.[189] These university academics provided the intellectual ballast for the maintenance of the incumbent system and therefore played important historical roles. Nevertheless, none of the interviewees in this case study identified an individual university academic as an important contributor to the reform process.[190]

The deeply embedded status quo position on child protection laws in NSW (and across Australia) was evident in the communique from the July 2008 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting. The communique states that governments would continue to 'improve prevention and early intervention for families and children at risk' (COAG, 2008). That is, family support and preservation were the uniformly accepted priorities and solutions for child protection around the country.

Relatively few 'reformers' mobilised against this status quo view (as the second side of the debate). Indeed, interviews for this case study identified only three external actors comprising the reformist field: the CIS, the not-for-profit child welfare agency Barnardos Australia, and Adopt Change, the charity founded by actress Deborra-Lee Furness in 2009.[191] Importantly, these actors' views significantly diverge on several sensitive issues within the child protection field. But they do agree on the need to legitimise adoption and create an efficient, timely and viable avenue to adoption (and permanency more generally) from out-of-home care.

Barnardos Australia had advocated for adoption reforms for two full decades before the CIS's noisy entry into the debate in 2009 (interview with Tregeagle, 2020). But, unlike the CIS, Barnardos did not pursue the issue as a political problem. The long-time CEO of Barnardos, Louise Voigt, saw the need to work across the aisle and, despite being unafraid to 'ruffle feathers', favoured 'quieter internal conversations' to promote her perspectives (interview with Benscher, 2020a). Nevertheless, Barnardos Senior Manager, Dr Susan Tregeagle, concedes that Barnardos attempts to make adoption-from-care a more integral part of the system had been 'largely unsuccessful, in contrast to perhaps Jeremy and the CIS' (interview with Tregeagle, 2020). Barnardos had also been 'highly sceptical' about the efficacy of family

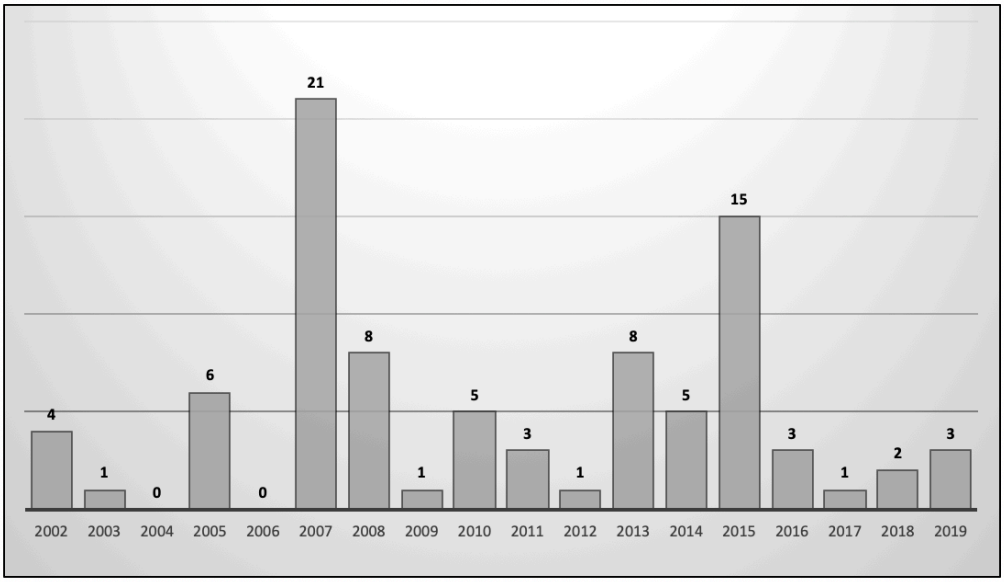
[189] Susan Tregeagle from Barnardos sought academics' support on the merits of adoption, and 'every single one of them said no' (interview with Tregeagle, 2020).
[190] Philip Mendes – himself an academic – being the exception (he referenced another academic scholar).
[191] Adopt Change was previously named Orphan Angels Ltd, National Adoption Awareness Week Ltd, and Adoption Awareness Ltd before trading as Adopt Change Ltd in 2014 (ASIC, 2020).

preservation (interview with Tregeagle, 2020) and controversially supported national open-adoption targets to address the swelling numbers of children in long-term care (Browne, 2014).

Four years before the CIS entered the debate, Liberal Party MP Bronwyn Bishop launched the *Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas* to harmonise the disparate *inter-country* adoption laws and requirements across Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). Bishop concluded that an 'anti-adoption culture permeate[d] the entire bureaucracy' and railed against the bias to maintain 'biological links' (ABC News, 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). In the present case, Anonymous Interviewee E (2020) concurs, stating 'the federal government department hates international adoption, so they will do anything they can to stop that'. The need for the CIS to focus its efforts at the state level was clear.

Bishop's references (commencing in 2005) to a purported 'anti-adoption' culture were the first to systematically appear in the Australian press.[192] The 'anti-adoption' phraseology persisted, but Bishop's engagement waned after 2007.[193] Figure 9.1 details the prevalence of the 'anti-adoption' phraseology in the Australian press, evidencing the reformers' attempts to frame the issue in the public sphere.

Figure 9-1: Print media references to 'anti-adoption' (number of references by year)



[192] A Factiva search using the term 'anti-adoption' in 'Major News and Business Sources: Australian and New Zealand' for 'All dates', was performed on October 29, 2020.
[193] Additional Factiva searches (and of Commonwealth *Hansard)* show Bishop rarely referenced the issue after 2007.

Deborra-Lee Furness launched her campaign to liberalise Australia's inter-country adoption laws in August 2007. Furness pleaded for a more efficient pathway to inter-country adoption based on her own difficult experiences with the process.[194] She denounced Australia's 'anti-adoption' culture and publicly lobbied political leaders for reform. In December 2007, Furness reportedly scored a 'major victory', with newly installed Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (who previously met with Furness as Opposition Leader in November 2007) agreeing to implement systemic reforms and make inter-country adoption 'a priority'. Furness stated she was 'absolutely thrilled' (Connolly, 2007). Strikingly, the reforms proposed by the Rudd Labor government were substantially consistent with the recommendations made under the Liberal Party-initiated 'Bishop Inquiry' in 2005.[195] Contrary to the CIS's subsequent arguments, those on the left took the first steps to arrest the precipitous decline in Australia's adoption numbers (and advance the broader acceptance of adoption).

It is important to emphasise that both Bishop and Furness focussed on *inter-country* adoption, not local or known adoption. Further, the Bishop Inquiry's recommendations and Furness' campaign primarily targeted reform at the federal level, whereas the states govern child *protection* and local adoption. As such, neither Bishop nor Furness engaged more broadly on child protection measures such as statutory removal and out-of-home care.

Deborra-Lee Furness' power in this debate came from her celebrity. She was able to draw political attention to her campaign principally because of her (and her husband's) star power. Evidencing her public profile, Furness met with then-Prime Minister Tony Abbott on the lawns of Kirribilli House in 2013 to specifically promote inter-country adoption (Maley, 2013). But Furness later altered her focus. The ensuing analysis shows that Furness – alongside the CIS – played an influential role in the evolution of NSW policy. These civil society representatives provided crucial leadership on the issue and ploughed the path for willing politicians to embrace reforms in a less hostile policymaking environment.

The CIS's power comes from its infrastructure and financial resources and, importantly, the sophistication of its scholars. The institute's operational competencies at the organisational level allowed its scholar Jeremy Sammut to pursue a variety of methods to promote his arguments (Wu et al., 2018, pp. 8-11). Sammut authored seven comprehensive

[194] Furness and her husband (the Australian actor Hugh Jackman) adopted two children while in the US due to impediments they encountered in Australia (Connolly, 2007).
[195] The Sunday Telegraph and The West Australian both detailed the reforms (Johnson, 2008; Melouney, 2008).

research reports and six briefing papers on child protection and adoption between 2009 and 2018. The research is extensive and penetrating, a claim that one must concede regardless of one's views on Sammut's arguments, inferences and conclusions. Sammut additionally penned twenty-four opinion pieces (on this issue) in major Australian newspapers over the same period while also appearing on the Alan Jones talkback radio show, ABC *Lateline,* and Sky News with Peta Credlin and Andrew Bolt.[196] The CIS produced five videos (accessible on the CIS *YouTube* channel) to promote Sammut's newly-released research reports. Sammut launched his full-length book, *The Madness of Australian Child Protection*, at events in four states in 2015, accompanied by an impressive assemblage of luminaries. The Sydney launch was to feature the newly ex-Prime Minister Tony Abbott, but he later withdrew. Deborra-Lee Furness took the ex-Prime Minister's place at the launch.

The CIS submitted a report to the (federal) House of Representatives' *Inquiry into Local Adoption* in 2018, and Sammut was subsequently invited to appear before the House of Representatives Standing Committee on May 29, 2018. The CIS packaged Sammut's appearance into a podcast and made it available on the Apple podcast app (CIS, 2018b). Away from parliamentary inquiries, Sammut enjoyed considerable political access. Pru Goward, the former NSW Minister for Family and Community Services, states that she met with Sammut 'several times' to discuss his child protection and adoption proposals (interview with Goward, 2020).[197] Other members from the former Minister's office, and the FACS department, also confirm their numerous meetings with Sammut (Anonymous Interviewee D, 2020; Benscher, 2020a). In sum, the CIS's stature and resources smoothed the path for Sammut. He was well-positioned to become a pivotal player on this issue if he was prepared to play the long game and produce ideas of sufficient merit.

The primary non-government actors in this debate separate into two distinct sides. The protectors of the status quo were a tight network of welfare agencies (as represented by ACWA) and social policy academics. The reformers – the CIS, Barnardos and Deborra-Lee

[196] Sammut's newspaper articles were identified through two Factiva searches: 'Jeremy Sammut *and* adoption'; and 'Jeremy Sammut *and* child protection *not* adoption'. The search incorporated 'Major News and Business Sources: Australian and New Zealand'. Sammut appeared on 2GB with Alan Jones on May 2, 2014, and on 4BC on November 17, 2017; he appeared with Peta Credlin on Sky News on November 17 and 28, 2017; on the Bolt Report on August 9, 2016; and on ABC *Lateline* on July 22, 2013. The television and radio appearances were located using simple Google searches.

[197] Pru Goward was Minister for Family and Community Services from April 2011 to April 2014, and from January 2017 to April 2019 (NSW Government, 2020a).

Furness – initially acted in isolation but increasingly interacted with one another as the debate evolved, while also allying with the reform-minded NSW Liberal Party government.

9.4.4 Ideas

The CIS argument

The debates surrounding child protection and adoption variously focus on the causes of child maltreatment (Parton, 2019), the appropriate balance between parent's rights and children's rights (Mendes, 2017, p. 48), permanency options and timelines (Butlinski et al., 2017; Riggs, 2018), the primacy of family preservation (Goddard et al., 2017), the extent to which abusive or neglectful parents can be rehabilitated (Pizzey et al., 2017), and the merits of adoption (Quartly et al., 2013). The CIS's challenge to the 'conventional thinking' on child protection systems emerges from these debates.

The CIS's Jeremy Sammut is unapologetic for the unreserved approach he took to this emotive issue. Sammut refers to it as 'hard advocacy', where he aggressively identified both the cause and the solution (from his perspective) to the burgeoning numbers of 'at-risk' children living in out-of-home care (interview with Sammut, 2020b). According to Sammut, the underlying issue was the welfare dependency of dysfunctional parents in Australia's 'white underclass' (interview with Sammut, 2020b). His focus on welfare dependency is wholly consistent with the CIS's long-held traditions that position the 'welfare state' as a danger to the central tenets of liberalism (Mendes, 2003, pp. 39-43; 2017, pp. 46-49). Sammut makes his position on the issue clear:

> You go look at those three kids [Ebony, Dean Shillingsworth, and Chloe Valentine] and you tell me that welfare and dysfunction didn't play a role in their short, nasty, horrible, lives and deaths […]. Calling out dysfunction and calling out the role of welfare is hard advocacy […]. So, if people find it confronting, it's confronting for a reason – to wake them up (interview with Sammut, 2020b).

The supposed solution to the problem of impaired parenting was the early removal of children, and adoption. While the so-called 'orthodox' arguments in child protection favoured family support and family preservation, Sammut advocated more aggressive interventions (the removal of children) and defined pathways to permanency (interview with Sammut, 2020b). Indigenous children should not be excluded from this program and, instead, should be 'mainstreamed' – a non-discriminatory approach, according to Sammut (2015, pp. 38-40).

Sammut was acutely aware that his messages were controversial and disruptive. He explains:

> Nobody had laid their cards on the table the way I did and said its welfare dependence of dysfunctional families that are damaging our children, and that kids need to be removed for them to stop damaging them, and for their own protection. I don't think anybody had been prepared to go there. […] Nobody in any government in Australia was talking about anything approaching raising adoption numbers – they weren't even using the word, let alone talking about having that as the ultimate point for children who can't go home safely, before I started doing my work (interview with Sammut, 2020b).

Sammut first published on child protection in 2009 in a CIS *Policy Monograph* entitled *Fatally Flawed: The Child Protection Crisis in Australia* (Sammut, 2009a).[198] In this early work, which specifically concentrates on NSW's child protection system, Sammut focuses on the underlying causes of child maltreatment – namely, he argues, welfare dependency and family dysfunction. He seeks to 'reconceptualise' the issue to counter the 'institutional and ideological shifts that have reoriented child protection work away from child rescue and towards family support' (Sammut, 2009a, p. 15). In short, Sammut argues that child protection services have become 'family-centred rather than child-centred' (Sammut, 2010, p. 3).[199]

Initial engagements

Sammut asserts that the 'NSW reform journey' commenced in March 2011 at a forum on child protection featuring the then-Shadow Minister Pru Goward (just before the NSW election).[200] Sammut participated in the discussion and presented his disruptive views, directly challenging the ideas presented by ACWA at the same forum (interview with Sammut, 2020b).[201] Says Sammut:

> But basically, after that, [Minister Goward's] staff came and saw me and had a few discussions. They went off and then they basically set in train the process [of reform]. […] I know that first interaction had an important role in seeding the ideas that maybe what they've been told about the problems and solutions were wrong (interview with Sammut, 2020b).

[198] The foreword to this piece was penned by Professor Chris Goddard from Monash University who, as Sammut acknowledges, played a key role in Sammut's intellectual development on the issue (interview with Sammut, 2020b).
[199] See Mendes (2017, pp. 48-49) and Tregeagle and Cheers (2016, pp. 241-242) for a critique of Sammut's arguments.
[200] Two interviewees independently confirmed this event but were unable to recall its title.
[201] Minister Goward's Chief of Staff, Anthony Benscher, confirms this version of events (Benscher, 2020b).

The NSW Family and Community Services Minister Pru Goward (initially from 2011-2014) endorses the idea that Sammut's arguments had an early impact on her policy thinking: 'he provoked me – that was his role – he provoked me' (interview with Goward, 2020). Minister Goward's Chief of Staff[202], Anthony Benscher, who participated in the early meeting with Sammut, comments further:

> Yes, I was interested in his ideas. […] He was somebody who obviously had some very strong views but strong views that were supported by evidence and fact. We were interested to hear (interview with Benscher, 2020a).

Evolutionary ideas

Sammut's ideas at this early stage were a work-in-progress. He had a strong perspective on the problems and causes, but his solutions were underdeveloped. Sammut did provide several policy recommendations in his early reports, although his analysis focussed on explaining why and how the present situation emerged. Sammut admits as much: 'I didn't have an overarching view of what my policy aim was at the start' (interview with Sammut, 2020b). Moreover, former Minister Goward asserts that she and her department pioneered the adoption solution. Goward submits:

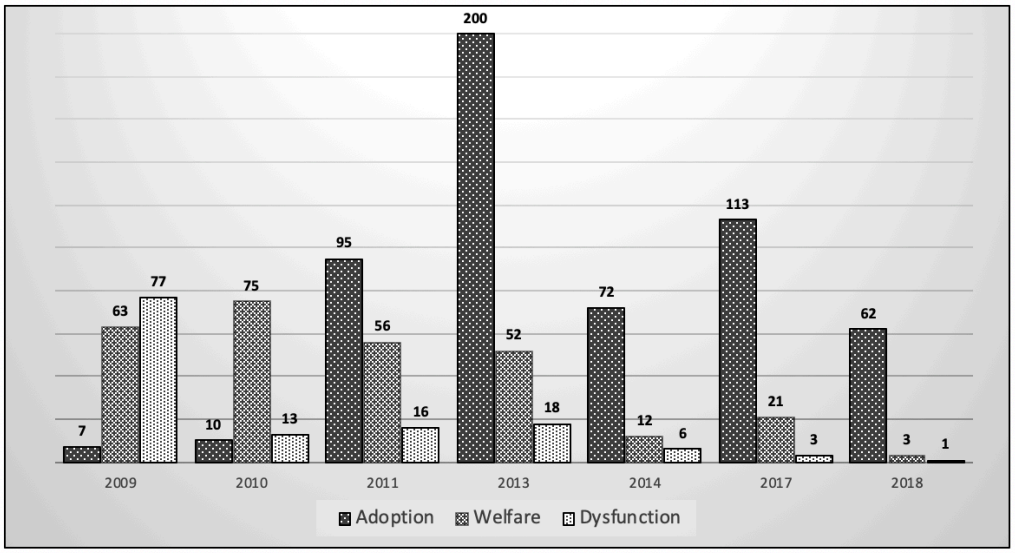
> Jeremy was very much of the view that you should 'take them all' [children living with dysfunctional parents]. […] So, this was sort of an ongoing discussion, in private. […] Then Jeremy, to give him his due, accepted I thought my point that you can't take all of the kids, but then said, when you do take them they've got to have a permanent solution. And by then I was starting to advocate for adoption and he absolutely got behind that. […] So, I mean, I have great respect for Jeremy, but the fact is, it wasn't his idea to promote adoption, it was mine – sorry, ours, because I had a very, very clever adviser and the whole ministerial office got very deeply engaged on it. But there's no doubt that it was provoked by his point that these kids [in care] have wretched lives (interview with Goward, 2020).

The evolution of Sammut's arguments can be mapped by inspecting his seven comprehensive research reports between 2009 and 2018. Sammut agrees that his framing changed over time, informed by his more complete understanding of the issue's political context, following persistent engagement with government officials (Anonymous Interviewee D, 2020; Sammut, 2020a). Figure 9.2 substantially evidences Pru Goward's claims, showing less frequent references to 'adoption' in Sammut's early work, but spiking dramatically in the

[202] Benscher was temporarily assigned responsibility for community services advice – in addition to his Chief of Staff role – when the new Liberal government first came into office.

immediate aftermath of the Liberal Party election in March 2011 (and meetings with the Goward bureaucrats).[203] This is not to suggest that adoption was not an important part of Sammut's original thesis, but his emphasis was demonstrably elsewhere. Figure 9.2 also demonstrates the extent to which Sammut de-emphasised the divisive and, to many in the child protection industry, unpalatable claims that 'welfare' and 'dysfunction' were to blame for child maltreatment.

Figure 9-2: Word frequency in Sammut's research (by year)



Nevertheless, it is important to note that Sammut did author an op-ed piece in *The Australian* newspaper in June 2009 that promoted adoption as an appropriate means to remediate child neglect or maltreatment (Sammut, 2009b). In a follow-up piece, Sammut argued that the debate surrounding adoption in Australia 'must be reopened' (Sammut, 2009c).

Pru Goward's speeches while Opposition Shadow Minister evidence her early support for adoption, but it appears she might not have been aware of Sammut's work in 2009 and 2010 (see, for example, Parliament of New South Wales, 2010). Nevertheless, Sammut had sufficient profile to be invited to the forum to deliver his views directly to the future Minister (and her staff). His distinctive and confronting perspectives ensured that child protection and adoption reforms were on the political agenda.

[203] Sammut's 2011 report was published in November.

The CIS's challenge to the child protection status quo (articulated in Sammut's first op-ed piece in *The Australian*) drew a swift rebuke from scholar Philip Mendes. Mendes had earlier asserted that the CIS had 'clearly helped to shape the social policy agenda' in Australia (Mendes, 2003, p. 47). In an interview for the present case, Mendes added, 'let me say, I think they are very good at what they do – they're very effective in influencing debates' (interview, 2020). Wary of the CIS's agenda-setting prowess, Mendes responded by decrying the 'take-them-all' mentality Sammut espoused (Mendes, 2009). But Sammut had succeeded in the crucial first steps to influencing policy: he had brought attention to the issue in the public domain and he had redefined the parameters of the debate.[204]

Issue framing[205]

Although Sammut might not have had well-defined policy objectives in his early works, his 'hard-headed' approach sought to reframe the issue debate (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Sammut, 2020a). Sammut initially attempted to redefine the underlying causes of child maltreatment, the efficacy of the family preservation-oriented system, and the importance of permanency (the latter two were the foci of the 2013 *Safe Home for Life* government reform package). As a status quo challenger, Sammut needed to 'expand the scope of conflict' to ensure his controversial ideas were permissible in the policy debate (Schattschneider, 1960, pp. 2-18; Ricci, 1993, pp. 198-199; Baumgartner et al., 2009, p. 156). This reframing demonstrably impacted the way policymakers approached the issue. Pru Goward states:

> Jeremy came along and said, 'this is outrageous – you've had a Royal Commission, da, da, da'. And I said, 'oh, yes, you're quite right. What do we do about that?' and started to re-think a bit of it. […] I think what he did was give [people] permission to say, 'of course, of course they should be adopting – it's outrageous to think they don't have a permanent family' (interview with Goward, 2020).

Goward's Chief of Staff Anthony Benscher corroborates Sammut's role in this early reform period:

> I wasn't aware of anybody else that was focussed in a research sense, as an outsider if you like, in this portfolio other than Jeremy. There may have been other people, but I wasn't aware of it at the time. He was the guy. […] When we came into power, there was

[204] To re-emphasise, Deborra-Lee Furness had been solely lobbying for changes to the inter-country adoption process at this early stage.

[205] Framing is a deliberate attempt to promote 'a particular conceptualisation of an issue' or to 'reorient the thinking about an issue' (Chong and Druckman, 2007, p. 104).

> just a lack of any evidence to support any of this work other than just questionnaires on how do you feel after it. And Jeremy was able to speak about that quite directly, quite forcefully, and quite strongly. But we weren't able to. […] In terms of the generality of the points he was making – the need for reform and the need for permanency and to do things and to maybe balance the ledger a little bit between early intervention and permanency – he was certainly; it was helpful for there to be someone else out there talking about it (interview with Benscher, 2020a).

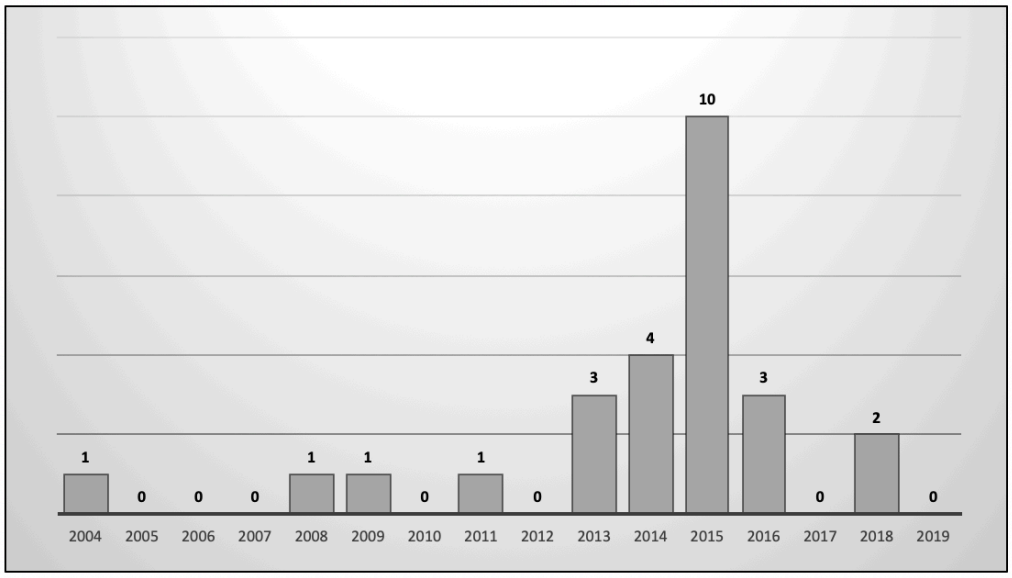
Both Susan Tregeagle (from Barnardos) and scholar Philip Mendes agree that Sammut was able to reframe the debate and 'get it on the policy agenda as a legitimate option to think about' (interviews with Mendes, 2020; Tregeagle, 2020).[206] Sammut's early contributions had helped to convert political attention into political priority. That is, the newly installed political leaders of NSW had 'mobilised official institutions' to address the discerned failings of the incumbent child protection system (Shiffman and Smith, 2007; Baker et al., 2017).

Sammut's prominence in the public sphere peaked between 2014-2016. His elevated visibility coincided with the release of multiple research reports and his full-length book. Throughout this period, Sammut championed the idea that there was an official 'taboo' on adoption in Australia (Sammut, 2015, pp. 14-19). He states that this framing formed part of his strategy 'to normalise something that was seen as impossible and wrong' (Sammut, 2020b). This depiction was also designed to resonate with the media. Figure 9.3 details how often the terms 'adoption' and 'taboo' appeared in the same print media article between 2000 and 2019.[207] Sammut himself authored four of the seventeen articles between 2014 and 2016. But twelve unique journalists authored the remaining thirteen articles, illustrating the extent to which he succeeded in harvesting this narrative.

[206] It is important to note that while the CIS and Barnardos aligned on the validity of adoption as a permanency solution, there were otherwise critical differences in their perspectives. Susan Tregeagle states that some of Sammut's proposals made it 'much harder' for Barnardos when dealing with the child welfare sector (interview with Tregeagle, 2020).

[207] This Factiva search was conducted on November 30, 2020, using the search criteria 'adoption' *and* 'taboo' between January 1, 2000, and January 1, 2020.

Figure 9-3: Print media references to adoption 'taboo' (number of references by year)



Issue framing is a key factor when setting agendas and establishing political priorities (Shiffman and Smith, 2007; Baker et al., 2017). On the present issue, Sammut was methodical and particular, targeting both the internal frame (the causes of and solutions to the issue, as perceived by the policy community) and the external frame (how the issue was portrayed in the public sphere) (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, pp. 1371-1372). Sammut's internal frame pitched child maltreatment as an individual problem perpetrated by dysfunctional parents (reliant upon welfare) – a frame that is particularly resonant following a tragedy (Parton, 2019). If Sammut's assertions were accurate, then the focus on parental rehabilitation to allow reunification was misguided. Adoption from care, therefore, became a logical alternative. Sammut's external frame promoted similar themes to a public with pre-existing reservations about welfare and its impacts (including his committed CIS supporter-base).

But Sammut's messages risked alienating key industry players (Anonymous Interviewee D, 2020; Tregeagle, 2020). His framing required fine-tuning to assuage the child welfare sector more broadly if the government was to prevent an industry rebellion. Sammut's messages subsequently became 'more balanced' and 'palatable' through his acknowledgement of the importance of permanency and preservation (Anonymous Interviewee D, 2020).[208] This more balanced approach allowed Sammut 'to have more influence on a broader range of people' – something Sammut attributes to his 'maturation as a scholar', but more likely reflects

[208] For an exemplar of Sammut's more balanced approach, see his testimony to the Commonwealth *Inquiry into local adoption* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018, p. 16).

accusations that Sammut's obduracy was 'damaging' the cause (Anonymous Interviewee D, 2020; Sammut, 2020b).

Adherents

The CIS and Jeremy Sammut attracted the attention of other high-profile protagonists.[209] In April 2015, the State Coroner of South Australia released his *Inquest into the Death of Chloe Lee Valentine* and featured a passage from Sammut's 2011 research piece *Do Not Damage and Disturb* on the report's cover page (Johns, 2015).[210] The Coroner extensively referenced Sammut's work, stating, 'I have been impressed by the work of Dr Jeremy Sammut of the Centre for Independent Studies in relation to the failures of Australian child protection systems' (Johns, 2015, p. 114).

In November 2015, the (newly) ex-Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, authored an op-ed piece that extensively referenced Sammut's book. Importantly, Abbott also linked Sammut's ideas to his own attempts to simplify inter-country adoption regulations within the COAG framework (Abbott, 2015). Abbott's references in this regard are telling. Inter-country adoption appeared on the COAG agenda (and in the ensuing communique) for the first time in May 2014 (COAG, 2014a, 2014b). This particular COAG meeting was the first after Prime Minister Abbott's public meeting with Deborra-Lee Furness at Kirribilli House on December 23, 2013. But in his op-ed piece, written as ex-Prime Minister, Abbott invoked Sammut's work (not Furness') to promote the cause of adoption-from-care, indicating the extent to which Sammut predominated in the public sphere.[211]

Sammut's prominence during this period evidences the political attention he attracted to his provocative arguments. And the above two exemplars point to Sammut's role in encouraging the issue's evolution from political attention to political priority. These references by the State Coroner of South Australia and the ex-Prime Minister are not idle musings – they represent a call to action by senior public figures to initiate policy change (while acknowledging neither had the authority to directly affect these proposals).

[209] 'Major Australian and New Zealand Newspapers' cited Sammut twenty-six times between 2014-2016 on child protection and adoption. This count excludes articles authored by Sammut himself. Two separate Factiva searches were used to obtain this data, with the search criteria 'Sammut' *and* 'adoption', and 'Sammut' *and* 'child protection' *not* 'adoption'. The search date was November 30, 2020.

[210] Four-year-old Chloe Valentine died at the hands of her parents on January 20, 2012.

[211] This study could not locate any direct references by Tony Abbott to local adoption before the cited article.

A networked approach?

Nevertheless, the CIS's role in the reform process should not be overstated. Indeed, Sammut himself is very careful when describing the extent to which he influenced the legislative outcomes (as operationalised in the *Safe Home for Life* and *Their Futures Matter* packages).

> My impact was to basically shake up what was a conventional way of thinking. The credit for translating that into something that was implementable goes to the people in the department. […] This is one of the limitations of think tanks. They're very good at drawing attention to problems; they're sometimes very good at identifying the solution, but going from a-to-b often requires stuff that's implementable, and that's often where they fall down (interview with Sammut, 2020a).

Some suggest that Barnardos had a causal impact, arguing that they 'successfully lobbied for changes in NSW adoption laws' (Elks, 2015). But Susan Tregeagle prudently balances the relative impacts on the reform process: 'Well, given that we had been grinding away in the background and putting submissions in on every government inquiry – but the only people doing that – when Jeremy came along we were very grateful for his analysis' (interview with Tregeagle, 2020). Nevertheless, government officials recognised that Barnardos had 'always' played a 'very big role' and were 'absolutely' an important part of the reform process (Anonymous Interviewee D, 2020; Benscher, 2020a). Barnardos traditionally framed its support for adoption around the potent themes of child vulnerability and children's rights (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 205). They were a well-respected voice in the debate and were, importantly, a part of the child welfare sector. This industry affiliation required Barnardos to simultaneously associate and distance itself from the CIS's controversial arguments to ensure it avoided being ensnared in a politically partisan dragnet.

Like Barnardos, Deborra-Lee Furness and her organisation, Adopt Change, targeted the external frame.[212] Adoption was a way to help 'the world's most vulnerable children'; those orphaned or abandoned by their parents (see Le Marquand, 2010; Furness, 2014). For Adopt Change, adoption was about child rescue: a powerful message that provokes public (and political) sympathies. But Furness' participation in the debate over the NSW reforms was not universally welcomed. Neither the child welfare sector nor the FACS department was enamoured with her contributions. One interviewee comments anonymously: 'the

[212] It is worthwhile noting that Adopt Change presently focuses on promoting permanency, whereby adoption is just one (important) option in a more comprehensive hierarchy (interview with Carter, 2020).

department didn't like the connection with Deborra-Lee Furness – definitely not – but from a political point of view, it was a smart move because the community love Deborra-Lee Furness, and they love Hugh Jackman.'

Furness originally prioritised inter-country adoption but later expanded her campaign to include local adoption. Former Minister Goward encouraged such an expanded focus:

> I met with Deborra Lee-Furness, and I said to her, 'if you just keep banging on about international adoptions, you're speaking to a very small group of people. If you start to talk about the importance of adopting local children and what adoption can provide a child […] I think you'd find there'll be a much wider degree of support'. So, they were very important – Adopt Change was very important (interview, 2020).

Evidencing Furness' relevance to the reform process, Adopt Change appears fifteen times in the diaries of the Minister's for Family and Community Services between 2014 and 2019.[213,214] In contrast, Barnardos appears eight times, and the Centre for Independent Studies does not appear at all (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2020).[215] Furness developed a formidable public profile as an adoption advocate and received the 2015 *NSW Australian of the Year* award for her work in the field. In announcing the award, the Minister for Family and Community Services, Gabrielle Upton, asserted that Furness had been a 'catalyst for adoption reform in Australia' and had 'helped transform social attitudes and laws around this issue' (The NSW Premier, 2016). The long-time CEO of ACWA, Andrew McCallum, also credits Adopt Change with putting adoption 'right in the centre of the continuum of out-of-home care' (interview, 2020).

It is apparent that these three reformists leveraged off each other to establish a powerful narrative favouring reform. Demonstrating their relationships, Sammut provided strategic advice to Adopt Change upon its formation; Deborra-Lee Furness wrote the foreword and launched Sammut's book; Sammut consulted with and provided analysis to Barnardos (Sammut, 2015, 2020a, 2020c; Tregeagle, 2020). And all three established consequential relationships with the Minister's office, which provided leadership on (and a vigorous commitment to) the reform process. This informal network of key protagonists promoted

[213] Over this period, the Minister's for Family and Community Services included Gabrielle Upton, Brad Hazzard, Pru Goward (for the second time), and Gareth Ward.
[214] Furness resigned from her Director role with Adopt Change in October 2016.
[215] The commencement date of the ministerial diary publications (July 2014) partially explains the CIS's absence (the CIS was purportedly active earlier).

policy measures consistent with their shared perspectives despite possessing divergent views in other areas of the debate.[216]

9.5 Conclusions

This thesis asserts that influence 'implies that a person can sometimes sway, persuade, or otherwise have an effect upon those who control from a position of authority' (Domhoff, 1967, p. 11). In the present case, Jeremy Sammut and the Centre for Independent Studies evidentially satisfied this interpretation. The CIS attracted political attention and persuaded (some) policymakers on the causes of and solutions to the issue. Over an extended period, Sammut drove the debate in the public sphere and helped to make sectoral reform a political priority.

The analysis supports several key inferences. First, the CIS's influence was concentrated at the early stages of the policy cycle. The scholar Jeremy Sammut reframed the issue and set an agenda through his aggressive pursuit of disruptive arguments. Through Sammut, the CIS presented itself as 'informed and independent voice in the policy debate', which, particularly during the early stages of the reform process, aided the NSW government in selling its proposals to the public and other elected officials (McGann, 2007, p. 5). Sammut's controversial research received rapid attention and careful consideration following the opening of a discernible – albeit tragic – policy window. His ideas might not have been popular within the sector but they had sufficient utility to warrant the immediate engagement of the incoming Liberal government of NSW. The final stage of the issue's evolution – from political priority to policy priority – is attributed to the government itself.

Second, Sammut's proposals applied equally to all Australian states and territories, but he concentrated his political engagement entirely in NSW. No other state in Australia introduced reforms of the same style. The commitment of the former Minister for Family and Community Services, Pru Goward (during the first term of the NSW government), was undeniably crucial to the reform process. But Sammut's policymaker engagement in NSW strongly points to his advocacy being a significant independent variable.

[216] Chapter Twelve more specifically discusses policy networks and the similarities and differences across the three case studies.

Third, the CIS was one member of a loosely affiliated policy network.[217] It was the combination of the CIS' research and outreach, with the campaigning of Deborra-Lee Furness (and Adopt Change) and the steady advocacy of Barnardos that influenced the reform process. Although the three 'reformers' created discrete narratives and defined the issue differently, they sought substantially similar outcomes and engaged with each other to further their mutual preferences. But to point to any individual actor playing a singularly definitive role in the reform process would overstate that actor's power – particularly given the critical role of Pru Goward (as the Minister who commenced the reform process) and her team.

Fourth, the case highlights the need to look deeper within the entity to appraise think tanks' activities and motivations. The extant literature barely contemplates the relevance of the individual think tank scholars, instead conceptualising these entities as faceless organisations (or reflecting the persona of their omnipresent Executive Directors). But it is the individual who produces and proselytises the ideas that determine success.

Finally, the case reveals a critical component of think-tanking. Institutes have greater utility if they can legitimate policy proposals in the public sphere; if they act as a means to an end for politicians. Sammut's influence on this issue is evident, but he also represented a resource – a tool – that the NSW government used to validate and promote policy. As an interviewee commented:

> The way it felt at the time was that we would use [Sammut] to promote something that we valued. That's how it felt to me. But that's only the perspective that I experienced. It may not be accurate in terms of reflecting truly that influence (Anonymous Interviewee E, 2020).

Chapter Twelve further explores these inferences.

[217] The circumstances in this case – and the engagement and actions of the primary actors – might fit within several incarnations of so-defined policy networks, and support different manifestations of the policy process. These observations are discussed further in Chapter Twelve.

Chapter Ten: School Funding Reforms

10.1 Introduction

On the current affairs television program *Q&A* on September 26, 2016, the Coalition government's Minister for Education and Training, Simon Birmingham, did what many observers considered unthinkable. The Minister suggested that he was prepared to allow some schools to be worse off under the school funding plans he was preparing (Henderson and Gribbin, 2016). Since 2001, both major political parties had abided by the 'no-school-worse-off' doctrine (Harrington, 2013; Savage and Lewis, 2016, pp. 9, 35). But what had been political dogma since the turn of the century was now seemingly under threat.

Peter Goss, the Director of the School Education Program at the domestically-focused think tank, Grattan Institute, saw Birmingham's intervention as a 'Nixon-goes-to-China' moment (interview, 2021b). Goss asserts that 'only a Liberal at that point in time could advocate for Independent schools to lose money, because Labor had been burnt so badly by it'.[218] John Daley, then-Executive Director of the Grattan Institute, was eager for his institute to get involved. Grattan moved quickly. It re-directed all of the resources of its existing schools program to the issue of funding – an area Grattan had hitherto 'steered well clear of' (interview with Daley, 2021).[219] The Grattan Institute believed a policy window had opened for a remedy to the protracted battle over the funding of state, Catholic and Independent schools in Australia.

School funding has been an emotive and fiercely debated issue for over fifty years (Goss and Sonnemann, 2016). Australia's major political parties have repeatedly 'sabotaged' each other's school funding plans to support their divergent preferences, only to leave it an 'entrenched dispute with no clear winner and no end in sight' (Taylor, 2018, p. xxiii). Unsurprisingly, a range of battle-hardened stakeholders bitterly contested the Coalition government's proposed reforms (in May 2017). And the Grattan Institute had knowingly taken

[218] Historically, the Australian Liberal Party has philosophically favoured a competitive *non-government* school sector. The Australian Labor Party has instead favoured the government school system. See Taylor (2018, pp. xxiii-xxvi) for the ideological rationale behind these inclinations.
[219] Grattan had maintained a 'School Education Program' since 2009.

on an issue dominated by formidable protagonists. But despite its limited historical presence, Grattan believed it could play a discernible role in policy formulation.

This chapter assesses the Grattan Institute's influence on the passage of the *Australian Education Amendment Act (2017).* The analysis focuses on the period commencing September 2016 – when Minister Birmingham began to publicly suggest reforms were in the offing – until June 2017, when the Senate passed the *AEA Act*. The issue clearly stretches beyond these confines, and the analysis references antecedent circumstances and policy measures. But Grattan's engagement on the funding issue was most heavily concentrated over this tightly defined period.[220]

The chapter demonstrates that Grattan played an important role in the debate. The Institute produced detailed proposals that substantially correspond to the ensuing legislation, although the causality of those proposals is indeterminate. More clear is the role Grattan played in the public sphere through the promotion of its proprietary scholarship. Grattan's proposals concorded with the government's plans and thus provided the government with critical legitimacy when other powerful stakeholders were vocally opposing the proposed legislation.

10.2 Methods

This chapter is informed by data from eleven semi-structured interviews and through the analysis of primary and secondary documents (mainly sourced from government and education-related non-government organisations). The interviewees were purposively selected using the witness list from the June 2017 Public Hearings into school funding by the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee (2017).

This study interviewed an individual participant from seven of the entities involved in the nine Public Hearing witness panels (members of the two governmental panels were unwilling to participate). One interviewee from the Catholic education system wished to remain anonymous, although all other interviewees agreed to their identification. The study therefore captures the important protagonists from the Education Minister's office, Independent schools, principal's organisations, parent's associations, and education unions.

[220] There have been important developments following the passing of the *AEA Act* in 2017, but this chapter does not pursue these subsequent developments. The chapter solely concentrates on the passing of the *AEA* legislation.

All interviews were transcribed and averaged forty-seven minutes (with a standard deviation of thirteen minutes).

10.3 Grattan Institute: Background

The Grattan Institute was formed in 2008 to focus on a range of domestic policy issues. It has since become one of Australia's most highly-regarded think tanks and prides itself on the production of 'rigorous' research with a 'practical' policy orientation (Grattan, 2021). The Institute is demonstrably non-partisan and has pursued policy initiatives that readily align with both the centre-left and the centre-right.

Chapter Four showed that the Grattan Institute is Australia's best-resourced think tank from a financial perspective. Grattan received a substantial endowment from the Federal and Victorian (Labor) governments at inception ($15 million each), in addition to $4 million from the mining giant BHP Billiton and $1 million from National Australia Bank (Grattan, 2021). That funding has enabled the institute to build a substantial profile as a credible interlocutor on most of the issues it pursues.

Grattan produces an annual *Impact Report* to broadcast the supposed effectiveness of its scholarship, whereby it classifies its contributions as having 'some influence', 'substantial influence', or a 'dominant voice' (now referred to as 'leading voice'). Grattan assessed that it was the 'dominant voice' in the debate over the 2017 school funding reforms, driving it to become a policy priority (Grattan, 2018b). This perceived predominance substantially emerges from Grattan's *Circuit Breaker* report, which was provoked by, and released shortly after, Minister Birmingham's remarks on the *Q&A* program in September 2016 (Goss and Sonnemann, 2016).

10.4 School Funding in Australia

10.4.1 Issue Characteristics

School funding is a complex issue.[221] While state and territory governments are primarily responsible for school education more broadly, funding is split between the Commonwealth

[221] This complexity is necessarily under-explored in this chapter. It is beyond scope to explain all of the important concepts relevant to school funding, such as the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), the socio-economic status (SES) system, the 'capacity-to-contribute' concept, and the system-weighted average method. See Harrington (2013, 2017b) and Expert Panel (2011) for extensive explanations of these concepts.

and states depending on the school sector (Harrington, 2013, p. 2). Government ('state') schools are primarily funded by state and territory governments, with the Commonwealth providing the balance of their entitlement. Non-government schools are primarily funded by the Commonwealth, with the residual entitlement provided by the relevant state or territory (Harrington, 2013, p. 2).[222]

There are two distinct constituents in the non-government school sector: Catholic systemic schools (approximately 19.4 per cent of total Australian school enrolments) and Independent schools (14.9 per cent of total enrolments) (ABS, 2021c). Government schools account for 65.7 per cent of all enrolments. Many Independent schools are affiliated with a particular philosophy or religion and are run as sector sub-systems. This sectoral diversity led to a complex set of contractual funding arrangements between the respective governments and educational bodies. Indeed, before the assent of the *AEA Act* in 2017, there were twenty-seven different funding models across the Australian education system (Harrington, 2017b).

Successive Commonwealth governments have sought to bring uniformity to Australian school funding. The *Review of Funding for Schooling* (now commonly referred to as the '*Gonski Review*') is the most prominent of the recent attempts. Prominent Australian businessman David Gonski AC chaired the *Review,* and sought to 'develop a funding system which is transparent, fair, financially sustainable and effective in promoting excellent educational outcomes for Australian students' (Expert Panel, 2011, p. xi). The Australian Labor Party government legislated the *Australian Education Act (2013*) based on the *Gonski Review* recommendations.

The agreement of state and territory governments is a critical requirement for a national school funding plan. The Labor Party sought to formalise its proposed 'needs-based, sector-blind school funding model' with the states via its *National Education Reform Agreement* (Senate Select Committee on School Funding, 2014, p. 55). However, several states (Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory) refused to ratify the reforms, resulting in a patchwork of agreements and arrangements (Senate Select Committee on School Funding, 2014, pp. 79-86).

[222] According to the *Australian Education Amendment Act (2017*), the Commonwealth government must provide 20 per cent of government school funding and 80 per cent of non-government school funding (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017a, p. 7). This level of funding is calculated off a pre-determined Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) amount (see Harrington, 2017b).

The difficulty in forging a broadly agreed school funding arrangement reflects the high-stakes nature of the issue. In 2019-20, total school education spending at all levels of government was approximately $59 billion (ABS, 2021b). In that year, the Commonwealth government budget for schooling was approximately $21 billion, or about 35 per cent of total government expenditure on school education at all levels (Ferguson and Harrington, 2019). The budgeted Australian government expenditure on school education in 2019-20 amounted to 4.2 per cent of total Australian government expenditure (Ferguson and Harrington, 2019).[223]

These substantial expenditures speak to what Shiffman and Smith (2007, p. 1371) refer to as issue 'severity' – 'the size of the burden relative to other problems'. School education has consistently been the third or fourth-largest expenditure item in the Commonwealth budget over the past two decades (see Duncan and Cassells, 2017). For most Australian states, it has remained the second-largest expenditure item (see, for example, NSW Government, 2018, pp. 6-11; Victorian Government, 2018, p. 29). These characteristics make education spending a priority, or a 'core' issue for governments at all levels (see Althaus et al., 2020, pp. 89-91, 231).

With so much at stake, Australia's three distinct schooling sectors have jealously protected and persistently lobbied for escalating government funding arrangements. However, the decline in academic performance of Australian school children is an important element of the school funding issue (see Review Panel, 2018, pp. 5-12). Academic performance is a 'credible indicator' of the benefits of heightened school funding (see Shiffman and Smith, 2007, p. 1371). The atrophy in performance is thus a key characteristic of the school funding issue. It fundamentally impacts the extent to which political parties agree on the solution to the problem of funding diffusion.[224]

Shiffman and Smith (2007, p. 1371) couple the concept of issue 'severity' with problem 'indicators' to determine whether 'effective interventions' are available to address the policy problem. Here, the characteristics of the school funding issue demonstrate the challenges faced by independent actors such as Grattan if they wish to influence political and policy

[223] For comparison, the 2017-18 schools funding package amounted to approximately 4 per cent of total Australian government expenditure (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b, p. 32; 2017c, pp. 24-25).

[224] This study understands that the debate over school funding is multi-faceted and that this summary does not begin to explain the issue's complexity. However, this problem description is broadly consistent with how the Grattan Institute framed its contributions to the debate, and it accordingly summarises the issue here.

priorities. The prospective solutions are contested, complicated, expensive, and difficult to implement. For Grattan to influence the evolution of policy, it would need to find more favourable circumstances or conditions on other Shiffman and Smith (2007) dimensions.

10.4.2 Political Context

School education policy has been a deeply partisan issue in Australia for decades. Indeed, it has been called Australia's 'oldest, deepest and most poisonous debate' (Warhurst, 2012; Goss and Sonnemann, 2017d; Taylor, 2018, p. xxii). But the so-called 'purposes of schooling' have evolved considerably since the 1970s under the competing philosophies of federal Labor and Coalition governments (Cranston et al., 2010). While the ALP has traditionally prioritised the 'public, democratic-equality purposes of schooling', the Coalition has instead given primacy to 'private, social-mobility' purposes (Cranston et al., 2010, p. 192). The Howard (Coalition) government emphasised market-oriented policies favouring social advancement through its 'parental choice' mantra, in contrast to the ALP's 'equality of opportunity' convictions (Cranston et al., 2010, pp. 187, 191-193; Watson and Liu, 2014, p. 169).[225]

The differences between the major parties have nevertheless narrowed over the past two decades. Watson and Liu (2014, p. 180) argue that there has been a general shift toward policy neoliberalism where 'the value of markets, competition and individual choice' have usurped Labor's traditional concerns regarding 'the equitable distribution of educational outcomes'. The trend toward policy concordance accelerated under the more-recent Coalition government of Malcolm Turnbull, resulting in a school funding proposal – manifested in the *Australian Education Amendment Bill 2017* – which tacked to the centre in an effort to 'neutralise one of [Labor's] greatest political appeals' (Greenwell, 2017; Hewett, 2017). [226]

The Coalition's proposals elicited divergent reactions. Peter Goss from the Grattan Institute believed the proposals could attract 'bipartisan support on the concept – active bipartisan support.' But 'pretty quickly, Labor came out and said that they weren't going to support it, which I felt [was] very frustrating and disappointing' (interview with Goss, 2021b). On the other hand, Mark Spencer – the Director of Public Policy at Christian Schools Australia – observed that education policy was a flagship issue for the ALP. Spencer asserts that 'having

[225] Prime Minister John Howard of the Liberal Party of Australia presided from March 1996 until December 2007.
[226] Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull of the Liberal Party of Australia presided from September 2015 until August 2018.

this taken off the table wouldn't have worked in their favour – they've got to keep it as a live issue' (interview, 2021).

The ALP had long considered education to be an issue core to the Party's identity. The ALP's predominance on the issue is evident in the *Australian Election Study* results, which show that Australian voters have favoured the ALP by wide margins as the 'preferred party on education' in ten out of the past eleven federal elections (see Cameron and McAllister, 2019, p. 35). It was crucial for Labor to hold on to this advantage by aggressively opposing the Coalitions policy 'olive branch' (Goss and Sonnemann, 2017d).

The 'Gonski Review'

Education policy is not an issue that typically attracts media headlines, despite its undoubted importance. There are relatively few so-called 'focusing events' – distinct, and typically discrete, situations that attract broad attention and concentrate the minds of politicians (Kingdon, 2011, p. 169). Instead, Althaus et al. (2020, pp. 189, 198) assert that school education policy in Australia 'easily slides off the media agenda' and that 'legislative attention outstrips media attention'. Nevertheless, the *Gonski Review* (released in December 2011), as the first review of school funding in four decades, brought considerable public and political attention to the school funding issue.[227]

A Factiva search reveals 1,418 references to Gonski's review in major Australian newspapers in 2012 and a further 2,592 in 2013 (before quickly subsiding in 2014 and 2015).[228] This exceptional media attention reflects the far-reaching implications of the review. Gonski advocated a 'major overhaul of funding for school education and […] a fundamental realignment of the historic funding roles of the Australian and state and territory governments' (Harrington, 2013, p. 35). It was a watershed moment that has contextualised the debate ever since.

As the instigators of the (first) Gonski review, the ALP effectively 'owned' the forty-one recommendations proposed by the expert panel. Gonski was routinely 'cited and celebrated by Labor as an Australian education hero' (Hewett, 2017). And with an election due in 2013, Labor (under both Prime Minister's Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd) embraced the proposals,

[227] The last comprehensive review of Australian school funding was published in 1973 (Karmel, 1973).
[228] This Factiva search used the search terms 'Gonski' *AND* 'education' in 'Major News and Business Sources: Australian and New Zealand' for 'All dates'. The search was executed on May 7, 2021.

encouraged by their bedfellows in the Australian Education Union (AEU) via their highly effective 'I-Give-a-Gonski' campaign (interview with Haythorpe, 2021).

But the advantage the Labor Party held on education did not translate into success at the ballot box.[229] The federal election on September 7, 2013, saw the ALP ousted in favour of a Coalition government under the leadership of Tony Abbott. Importantly, the Coalition failed to secure a majority in the Senate, therefore necessitating the support of independents and minor parties (together, the crossbench) to pass legislation. This situation repeated itself in the 2016 federal election.[230] Given the composition of the legislature, policies on hot-button issues such as school funding were unlikely to gain sufficient legislative support unless they were packaged to appeal to a broad policymaking audience.

'Turnbull co-opts Gonski'[231]

The 'no-school-worse-off' paradigm has been an important forerunner to funding debates over the past two decades. The idea that no school would lose funding under Commonwealth government policy is a legacy of the Howard era (see Harrington, 2013, p. 9). The ALP subsequently embraced this mantra as their own, thereby institutionalising this populist measure and constraining future policy formulation. It would require an audacious proposal to disrupt this 'classic tale of politics driving policy' (Savage and Lewis, 2016).

Although Education Minister Simon Birmingham raised the prospect of introducing bold policy measures in September 2016, the government did not reveal its formal proposals until May 2017 (Turnbull and Birmingham, 2017). The public launch of these plans was designed to have a substantial impact, and it achieved that objective. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Minister Birmingham publicly announced the proposals alongside a more-than-noteworthy proponent – none other than David Gonski himself. Peter Goss from Grattan deemed the launch a 'politically brilliant move' (interview, 2021b). It was indeed a 'stunning policy turnaround' (Knott, 2017). These proposals – dubbed Gonski 2.0 – are discussed further in section 10.4.4.

[229] On education policy, the ALP were the preferred party by a margin of eighteen points in both the 2013 and 2016 federal elections according to the *Australian Election Study* (Cameron and McAllister, 2019, p. 35).
[230] The 2016 federal election was held on July 2. Malcolm Turnbull, who ousted Prime Minister Tony Abbott in a leadership spill on September 14, 2015, was elected as Australia's new Prime Minister.
[231] Jennifer Hewett used this headline in the *Australian Financial Review* on May 2, 2017.

The requirement for new school funding arrangements was not necessarily a surprise. This was a 'predictable policy window', necessitated by Prime Minister Abbott's commitment to honour the original Gonski legislation for only four years (Kingdon, 2011, pp. 186-189; Harrington, 2017a).[232] But the extent of the proposals – which would result in three-hundred-and-fifty-three non-government schools receiving less funding than under existing legislation – represented the 'focusing event' that attracted Grattan's interest (Kingdon, 2011, p. 169; Harrington, 2017b).

Before Birmingham's interventions in September 2016 and then in May 2017, the Grattan Institute had placed the school funding issue in the 'its-never-going-to-happen-basket' (interview with Daley, 2021). But Grattan quickly recognised that the political environment had changed. Grattan deemed it a 'precious opportunity' and asserted that the 'time was right' for practical proposals to 'realise the Gonski aspiration of sector-blind, needs-based funding' (Goss and Sonnemann, 2016, pp. 7, 31; 2017c). The Grattan scholars were convinced they could meaningfully inject themselves into this long-standing debate and contribute to the formulation of agreeable proposals.

Table 10.1 details several of the events over the past two decades that have impacted the school funding debate (and are relevant to the present case).

[232] Herweg et al. (2015, p. 444) refer to this as a 'decision window', which is characterised by 'bargaining on the concrete design of the policy proposal'.

Table 10-1: Reports and events on school funding

Date Published	Report or Event Name	Impact or Effect	Responsible Party
December 2011	*Review of Funding for Schooling* ('Gonski Review')	Embraced by the ALP under Prime Minister Gillard	ALP government (Prime Minister Julia Gillard)
July 2012	*'I-Give-a-Gonski'* campaign	Calls to legislate the Gonski recommendations	Australian Education Union
June 2013 (assented)	*Australian Education Act 2013*	Legislated	ALP government (Prime Minister Julia Gillard)
August 2013	Coalition announces it will honour Gonski legislation	Commits Coalition to current funding legislation until 2017 end	Opposition Leader Tony Abbott
March 2016	Exploratory proposal to shift all government school funding to the states	Failed to gain traction	Coalition government (Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull)
September 2016	Education Minister Birmingham on ABC television *Q&A* program	Suggests some schools might be negatively impacted under future plans	Education Minister Simon Birmingham
November 2016	Grattan Institute releases *'Circuit Breaker'* report	Grattan's first major report on school funding	Peter Goss and Julia Sonnemann
May 2017	Launch of the Coalition government's new school funding plans	Some schools will be worse off	Prime Minister Turnbull, Education Minister Birmingham, David Gonski
June 2017	Senate Public Hearings on *Australian Education Amendment Bill*	Submissions and testimony from Grattan and other school education stakeholders	Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee
June 2017 (assented)	*Australian Education Amendment Act 2017*	Legislated	Coalition government (Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull)

There is an additional point worth noting about the timing of Birmingham's proposals and the broader political context. A *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* was established in January 2013 to investigate allegations of the abuse of children across a range of religious and educational institutions. The Commission's *Final Report* was issued in December 2017 and identified the Catholic Church as a prominent 'perpetrator' (Royal Commission, 2017). Thus, the coincident timing of the Royal Commission and the Turnbull government's proposed school funding arrangements, under which Grattan's Goss identified the Catholic system as 'the big loser', was a complicating factor in the political calculus (Goss and Sonnemann, 2017b). One interviewee – quoted anonymously here – volunteered the significance of this coincident timing:

> What was going to torpedo the legislation was always Catholic opposition. No question. There was a lot of debate at the time […] about how politically powerful the Catholics actually were and whether it was worthwhile the government holding their nerve with the Catholics. Because you have to remember that the other context at the time was that it was peak Royal Commission. So, the Catholics were on the nose big time at the time (interview with Anonymous Interviewee F, 2021).

This debate's cast of powerful stakeholders presented a formidable barrier to Grattan's influence, particularly given its relatively fresh entry into the funding field. But with one of the major antagonists hobbled, Grattan could potentially play a more prominent role than it might have otherwise.

10.4.3 Actor Power

It is important to consider whether it was feasible for Grattan to play a substantive role in the policy process. The incumbent field of seasoned stakeholders had deep government ties and represented politically powerful constituencies. These well-established stakeholders – part of what Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999, pp. 135-137) call a mature policy subsystem – could mobilise quickly and use their extensive community (schools-related) infrastructure to amplify their messages. Grattan did not possess these resources.

This section examines the relative positioning of the predominant stakeholders, thereby contextualising the debate and allowing for rival explanations of the policy evolution. In this regard, it is possible to break down the crucial actors into two broad categories (or sides): those supporting the government's new proposals and those favouring the original Gonski recommendations. To be sure, there are varied reasons for being on either side of this debate. There is no suggestion here that the organisations categorised in Table 10.2 shared the same rationale for supporting or rejecting the government's plans.[233]

Table 10-2: School funding interlocutors

Support Proposals	Reject Proposals
Grattan Institute	State governments
Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA, now ISA)	Catholic Education
Christian Schools Australia (CSA)	Australian Education Union (AEU)
Australian Secondary Principals Association (ASPA)	
Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO)	

[233] The entity list in Table 10.2 is non-exhaustive. However, these entities are mostly peak bodies of other representative organisations.

Government and non-government parties

Represented by the Minister for Education and Training, Simon Birmingham, the government itself was (naturally) this debate's most powerful actor. But within the Minister's office, the pivotal individual was the Minister's Senior Advisor on Schools, Scott Prasser.[234] Prasser was one of the primary architects of the plans and, although not public-facing, extensively engaged with relevant non-government entities. Several interviewees concur that Prasser was 'very material to the whole process' (interview with Colman, 2021).

Outside of the Coalition government, the best-resourced actors lined up *against* the proposals. The individual state governments were the most prominent of these antagonists and, under the new legislation, would need to make up the funding shortfalls they had presided over since the introduction of the original Gonski legislation. The state governments (both Liberal and Labor) had become 'the biggest obstacle' to the reforms and publicly rejected the Coalition's plans (Dodd, 2017b; Harrington, 2017b). Prasser pointed to the lack of support from the states as being a significant encumbrance:

> We had the NSW [Liberal] government allowing signs on schools 'give Gonski a go', so they're not our allies, ok. We'd lost the Newman [Liberal] government, so there were no allies in Queensland. There were no allies in Victoria, and we were losing allies in NT, and so on (interview with Prasser, 2021a).

The government also understood that the Labor Party was unlikely to embrace its proposals and it therefore needed to attract the support of at least nine Senate crossbenchers to pass the legislation (Gobbett, 2016).[235] The Australian Greens represented a block of nine votes but were hamstrung by internal bickering and were 'hedging their bets all the way to the vote' (interview with Greenwell, 2021). The minor party crossbenchers had elevated importance as a consequence. These minor party Senators possessed power through their votes and could demand amendments to the original Bill in exchange for their support. Ultimately, ten minor party crossbenchers voted in favour of the amended Bill.[236] The ensuing sections explain the Grattan Institute's role in persuading this outcome.

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[234] Prasser served in Birmingham's office from September 2013 until August 2018 (Prasser, 2021b).

[235] The Coalition won thirty of the seventy-six Senate seats in the 2016 federal election (Gobbett, 2016). A majority vote is needed to pass legislation.

[236] Those who voted in favour of the legislation were Pauline Hanson's One Nation (four votes), Nick Xenophon Team (three votes), Derryn Hinch's Justice Party (one vote), Family First Party (one vote), and Jacqui Lambie Network (one vote) (Goss and Sonnemann, 2017d). The Greens voted as a block against the proposals.

Even before the release of the government's proposals in May 2017, Grattan's Peter Goss had been aggressively promoting his *Circuit Breaker* report to state government administrators (Goss, 2021a). Goss held 'thirty-to-forty briefing conversations' with 'ministers' offices, opposition ministers' offices, departmental secretaries, and deputy secretaries', recognising that the implementation of any funding plan relied upon their support. It is, nevertheless, difficult to determine the impact of Goss' state government engagements.

Non-government organisations: the anti-reformists

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) were the two heavyweight non-government actors opposing the reforms. Both responded to the May 2017 launch of the government's reforms with an immediate and substantial counter-mobilisation. Both were able to do so at a scale that Grattan could not replicate. With offices and sister organisations spread across the country, both organisations could persistently lobby parliamentarians (more specifically, crossbench Senators) whose votes would be crucial to the passage of the legislation.

The NCEC is Australia's peak Catholic education body and works with the individual state and territory Catholic commissions to 'promote Christ-centred education' (NCEC, 2021b). Catholic schools have existed in Australia for almost two hundred years, and the Catholic school system is now the second-largest in the country (NCEC, 2021a). Presently, with over 777,000 students across 1,755 schools, the NCEC has the constituency and resource base to attract political attention to its causes and interests (NCEC, 2021a). Its enduing prominence links to the 'Goulburn Strike' of 1962, which was a defining moment in the provision of state-aid to non-government – particularly Catholic – schools (Warhurst, 2012).[237] This seminal dispute and the resultant political fallout helped to institutionalise Commonwealth funding for the Catholic education system since.

The Catholic Education Commission also has alumni within parliament. Former Liberal Party Senator Chris Back was part of the Catholic Education Commission in Western Australia before entering parliament in 2010 (Back, 2017). Upon reviewing the proposed legislation and conferring with the NCEC, Senator Back announced that he would oppose his own

[237] The 'strike' at six Goulburn Catholic schools over a lack of government support for critical infrastructure forced 2,000 students to enrol in government schools, heaping an insufferable burden on the state school system (Warhurst, 2012).

government's plans and cross the floor to vote with the opposition unless it met some of the NCEC's amendment demands (Back, 2017). The Senator understood that the Catholic education system played a crucial role in school funding debates and could impose itself in most circumstances. Mark Spencer of Christian Schools Australia provides the appropriate frame:

> We've always admitted that the whole issue of non-government schools funding pivots on the fulcrum of the Catholics. They are the bulk of the non-government sector, so everything needs to be viewed through the prism of how it's going to affect Catholic education (interview with Spencer, 2021).

The Australian Education Union is correspondingly pivotal. It is the peak body representing Australian public school teachers and support staff and has more than 185,000 members nationwide (AEU, 2021). Stakeholders across the school education industry, such as Phillip Spratt, formerly of the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), view the AEU as 'an incredibly powerful organisation [and] incredibly well resourced' (interview, 2021).

The AEU had already demonstrated its ability to mobilise at both the industry level (via direct engagement with policymakers) and at the grassroots level (in schools across the country) through its formidable 'I-give-a-Gonski' campaign. And the union was well-equipped to mount a similar operation to defend the 'clear framework' set out in the original Gonski review (interview with Haythorpe, 2021). It had assembled a 'massive war chest' of resources that it could use to fight the government's reform plans in critical jurisdictions such as South Australia, where several key crossbench Senators resided (Dodd, 2017a).[238]

The AEU's and NCEC's opposition left the government's plans exposed to a fall at the first hurdle. But several key players rallied around the proposals and provided the backing the government needed.

[238] All three minor party Senators from the Nick Xenophon Team, the sole Senator from Family First, and Sarah Hanson-Young from the Greens were all based in South Australia (Gobbett, 2016).

Non-government organisations: the reformists

The political reach and financial resources of the AEU and NCEC far outstripped those of the Grattan Institute.[239] But Grattan stood out as being the best resourced of those in favour of the reforms.[240] Regardless, the industry stakeholders that favoured the reforms represented critical constituencies that were politically consequential.

Australian Independent schools had 647,000 enrolled students across 1,169 schools in 2021 (ISA, 2021). These schools are represented on the national stage – particularly on the issue of Commonwealth funding – by Independent Schools Australia (ISA, formerly ISCA). ISA incorporates state- and territory-based member Associations, whose members are, in turn, the individual Independent schools (ISA, 2021). The majority (84 per cent) of these Independent schools are religiously affiliated, primarily with the Anglican and Christian faiths (ISA, 2020).

Industry stakeholders suggest that ISA played a significant role in this debate. For example, the Federal President of the AEU, Correna Haythorpe, asserts that ISA was 'very influential in terms of this whole debate with Birmingham' based on the diverse interests the ISA serve (interview, 2021). Colette Colman, the former National Executive Director of ISCA (now ISA), is correspondingly confident that ISA played a consequential role in the passage of the legislation:

> I don't think that the legislation would have got through […] without someone in the non-government sector supporting it. I don't think it would have got the numbers for the legislation to pass (interview, 2021).

Away from the Independent schools, it is significant that both the Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) and the Australian Council of State Schools Organisations (ACSSO) represent the interests of public (state) school constituencies. As such, their

[239] The financial resources of the AEU are considerable. The AEU Federal Office, plus the two largest state offices (NSW and Victoria), had a combined Total Equity position of $76 million and Total Revenues of approximately $71 million as at June 30, 2017. The Grattan Institute had a Total Equity position of approximately $37 million and Total Revenues of approximately $6 million at this date (see, AEU, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Grattan, 2017). This study was unable to determine the financial circumstances of the NCEC.

[240] Of the other stakeholders favouring the reforms, the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) reported a Total Equity position of approximately $2.5 million and Total Revenues of $2.6 million for the period ended December 31, 2017. ACSSO reported a Total Equity position of approximately $0.3 million and Total Revenues of $0.6 million as at June 30, 2017. Christian Schools Australia (CSA) reported a Total Equity position of approximately $2.0 million and Total Revenues of $3.5 million for the period ended December 31, 2017 (ACSSO, 2017; CSA, 2017; ISCA, 2017).

respective missions naturally align them with the AEU. Consistent with this supposition, the AEU's Correna Haythorpe asserts that ACSSO 'had always been with us during the I-Give-a-Gonski campaign' (interview, 2021). But the government's confounding proposals had fractured old alliances and diluted stakeholder cohesion, thereby diminishing the persuasiveness of individual stakeholders (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, pp. 1373-1375). ACSSO supported the Gonski 2.0 proposals, diverging from the AEU. Similarly, the Independent and Catholic-systemic sectors 'publicly parted ways' despite being historically aligned in pursuing their similar interests (interview with Colman, 2021).

Powerful groups were lined up on both sides of this debate but a unified advocacy coalition did not emerge, robbing them of an opportunity to amplify their voices (see Baker et al., 2017).[241] There was a notable absence of coordinated action despite constituents in the duelling camps aligning on the desired outcome. Thus, their policy interactions loosely resemble Hugh Heclo's (1978) original issue networks, characterised by varying 'degrees of mutual commitment or of dependence on others in their environment', rather than purposive, stable engagements (see Schneider, 2016, p. 374).[242] This fragmented approach left space for a reform advocate to provide leadership in the public sphere. The Grattan Institute substantially filled that void.

Grattan Institute

The Grattan Institute's power emerges from its independence and the sophistication of its intellectual contributions. Grattan's empirical orientation and its extensive body of scholarship have supported its stature as a respected authority on a broad range of policy issues. As a think tank, Grattan does not have the potentially persuasive constituency of other stakeholders. It does, however, have the intellectual infrastructure and financial wherewithal to mount significant campaigns in support of its ideas. The Institute has maintained a School

[241] It is noteworthy that the AEU's Correna Haythorpe and an anonymous interviewee from Catholic Education state that they rejected the Gonski 2.0 proposals for very different reasons. Haythorpe states that there was an 'awareness of each other's views', and Catholic Education asserts there were 'informal conversations', but both stop short of suggesting anything more organised (interviews with Anonymous Interviewee G, 2021; Haythorpe, 2021).

[242] Alternatively, these actors might loosely constitute an advocacy coalition, despite their seeming lack of coordination and collaboration. In this regard, Lindquist (2021, p. 105) asserts that 'advocacy coalitions were never originally imagined as coalitions in the strict sense.' These circumstances are further discussed in Chapter Twelve.

Education Program since 2009 and has consistently published comprehensive research in the field – except on school funding.

In the present case, Grattan's prominence within media circles and its credibility within the policymaking community made it an ideal surrogate for the government. Its proposals allowed Grattan to burnish the government's arguments in the public sphere – so important when attempting to attract crossbench support. Minister Birmingham was also keen to associate his proposals to Grattan's independent contributions (see, for example, Coorey, 2017). Scott Prasser – Minister Birmingham's Senior Policy Advisor on Schools – elaborates on this point:

> People were very confused about who to believe. 'Yes, can you believe government?' 'Of course not.' [But] if government's views have got some confluence with a think tank of some reputation, then that's worth listening to. And that's why they were so important (interview, 2021).

Across the key period from September 2016 until July 2017, Grattan was prolific, authoring sixteen pieces on school funding. Grattan directly engaged policymakers to promote this research and used the media to target the public. Table 10.3 illustrates the media prominence of the major actors over this period.[243] The results are striking. Grattan established a commanding presence despite being a non-stakeholder, demonstrating the desire for an independent voice in the debate. Colette Colman from ISA asserts that Peter Goss' 'profile was actually incredibly high at that time. He was the go-to person for the media for an independent view on what was happening' (interview, 2021).

Table 10-3: Print media references to school funding interlocutors, Sep 2016-June 2017

Entity	References
Australian Education Union	146
Grattan Institute	81
National Catholic Education Commission	65
Independent Schools Council of Australia	31

[243] This Factiva search was conducted on May 15, 2021. The search criteria stipulated '[full entity name] *AND* school *AND* funding' in 'Major News and Business Sources: Australian and New Zealand' between September 1, 2016, to June 30, 2017. The count excludes all duplicates. Other organisations in this chapter were referenced less than ten times, except the Centre for Independent Studies which was referenced thirty-three times (although most relate to a separate issue).

It is important to emphasise that Grattan was not a newcomer to school education debates, despite historically eschewing content on school *funding*. Grattan authored fifty-one reports and articles on schooling between 2009 and September 2016, firmly establishing it as one of the three key think tanks on school education policy (along with the Centre for Independent Studies and the Mitchell Institute).[244] This deep body of work enabled Grattan to develop an esteemed profile in media circles.

The Grattan Institute's eminence and the reputation of its School Education team – then consisting of Peter Goss, Julie Sonnemann and Kate Griffiths – facilitated its access to the key government officials who would decide the Bill's passage. Goss elaborates:

> I explicitly sat down one day and sent an email to every advisor of every single crossbencher – including the ones that I didn't think could be convinced – and said, 'I think this should go through, I've got the reasons, could I come talk to you?'. And basically, all bar one did (interview, 2021b).

The Institute's political reach stretched to the June 2017 Senate Public Hearings on the *AEA Bill*. Grattan was the only think tank invited to appear at the Hearings, as well as the only non-stakeholder entity, and the only organisation afforded a dedicated (as opposed to panel) session to discuss the Bill. Grattan's scholarship was also prominent throughout the Hearings. Three separate panels raised and discussed Grattan's proposals (including Committee members and witnesses), evidencing its role as a benchmark contributor to the debate. The references to Grattan's research during the Catholic Education panel are particularly instructive. In her introductory comments, Danielle Cronin – the NCEC Acting Executive Director – ironically cites Grattan's research to support one of Catholic Education's desired amendments. Cronin identifies no other entity in her opening monologue. Later in the Catholic Education panel, the Executive Director of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Stephen Elder (named the 'most powerful person in education' in 2018), again referenced Grattan and placed the Institute in an esteemed group (see Bolton, 2018). The 'SES is flawed', charged Elder, 'the Minister knows it, Mr Gonski knew it, the Grattan Institute knows it' (Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee, 2017, p. 25). It is apparent that Catholic Education saw Grattan as an important actor in this debate.

[244] This study does not ignore the CIS and Mitchell Institute. Both produce penetrating research on school education and have done so over a lengthy period. But interviewees identified neither as a consequential actor in this particular debate.

Grattan acted as a guiding institution in prosecuting this issue (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, pp. 1374-1375). Although not necessarily 'uniting the policy community', the Institute 'strongly championed the cause' of Gonski 2.0 and, through its independent proposals, led the debate in favour of the government's reforms (p. 1371). The content of Grattan's antecedent *Circuit Breaker* report and the proposed government reforms were substantially similar. Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Grattan's ideas influenced policy formulation.

10.4.4 Ideas

Circuit Breaker's central proposal (released in November 2016) included a reduction in the funding indexation level and a move to a floating rate.[245] Governments could use the accrued savings from the proposed reduction to ensure all schools received at least 95 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard by 2023 (Goss and Sonnemann, 2016, pp. 25-36). *Circuit Breaker* included two other recommendations: creating an independent body to govern the allocation of school funding, and the establishment of highly-skilled teacher roles to improve teaching and learning (Goss and Sonnemann, 2016, pp. 24, 37-42).

Reaction to Grattan's report was swift. Less than twenty-four hours after its release, Minister Birmingham probed the report in federal parliament. The 'thoughtful' report was 'welcomed' and contained 'very wise sentiments […] that the Turnbull government agree[d] with'. In addition, it 'absolutely demonstrate[d] an understanding of the budget pressures Australia face[d]' (Parliament of Australia, 2016). Grattan had quickly succeeded in attracting attention at the highest levels of government.

Then, on May 2, 2017 (five months after *Circuit Breaker's* release), Prime Minister Turnbull launched his Gonski 2.0 proposals alongside Minister Birmingham and David Gonski. The plans were 'clear and positive' and a 'brave' step forward (Goss, 2017d). Critically, the indexation rate had been reduced to facilitate the needs-based funding of all schools.

But Goss and Sonnemann saw room for improvement in the government's plans. They proposed three key amendments (in line with the *Circuit Breaker* proposals) and publicly exhorted the Senate crossbench to insist on these 'improvements' in exchange for their votes

[245] The *Australian Education Act 2013* set the Schooling Resource Standard target indexation rate at 3.6 per cent. Grattan advocated for a reduction in this target rate to 2.5 per cent to align with actual wage growth (Goss and Sonnemann, 2016, pp. 4, 21-26).

(Goss and Sonnemann, 2017b, 2017c). First, the government's ten-year timeline for full implementation needed to be brought forward by four years. Second, state governments should be required to commit to their funding responsibilities. Third, the government should establish a National Schools Resourcing Body to improve funding governance. On June 16, 2017 – one week before the Senate vote on the package – the press reported that the government had offered similarly-fashioned concessions to the crossbench in a 'secret' deal to secure their votes (Kenny and Knott, 2017). The Senate subsequently passed the legislation on June 23 – incorporating Grattan's three proposed amendments (Goss and Sonnemann, 2017d).

There is a strong correlation between Grattan's scholarship and the legislated *Australian Education Amendment Act 2017*, but unsurprisingly, conclusions regarding causation are equivocal. The present study was unable to interview any of the ten crossbench senators who voted in favour of the legislation – a significant obstacle to thorough process-tracing (only four of the ten crossbench senators who voted in favour of the legislation remain in parliament). But other interviewees provide crucial insights into the evolution of the government proposals.

Scott Prasser is well-positioned to comment on the significance of Grattan's contributions. While he concedes that the Institute played an important role, he presents a disjunction regarding the genesis of the central elements of the Gonski 2.0 proposals. The following interview exchange illustrates the discord:

> Hagland: [Grattan] was actively advocating those amendments to the proposed Bill with the crossbenchers individually. Were you aware of those…
>
> Prasser: I thought the Grattan Institute was following our amendments. I didn't see it as the Grattan Institute being influential in the amendments.
>
> Hagland: In the amendments to the proposed Bill? Ok, that's interesting.
>
> Prasser: Yeh. The National Schools Resourcing Board, that was our idea.[246] The discussion about changing the timeframes…
>
> Hagland: The timeline for implementation?
>
> Prasser: That was our discussion. There was lots of discussion going on between our office and Peter and so on. I think it's a two-way process, in a way, going on. And so, I don't see

[246] Goss and Sonnemann (2017a) point out that the NSRB was actually 'recommended by the Gonski 1.0 review in 2011' (see Expert Panel, 2011, pp. 191-193).

> their report as being the thing we looked at. I suppose it's a bit like, if you're fixing a flat tyre, there's only one way of fixing the flat tyre. And everyone comes up with the same way or the same options.

Prasser instead positions the government as leveraging Grattan's uncontested credibility – particularly in the public sphere – to legitimate the government's messages. Several other key actors similarly saw Grattan playing a decisive role in the public domain but remain circumspect regarding Grattan's contribution to policy formulation. According to these protagonists, Grattan's influence was in support of policy adoption. That is, Grattan sought to legitimate a 'preferred policy alternative' on which it believed it could convince the public and crossbenchers to 'accept a particular solution' (Anderson, 2011, pp. 4, 125). To these protagonists, the genesis of the idea was less important than the process of public legitimation, thereby endorsing Grattan's substantive role. The Gonski 2.0 proposals were, after all, a stunning policy adaptation for the Coalition government. A reputable and independent voice supporting that shift conferred immense value. Powerful actors on both sides of the debate illustrate the point:

> [Grattan] ended up being cited by a whole range of people about why this should be; why this legislation should be supported. […]. Having the Grattan involvement led people like Nick and Jacqui to think, 'oh, this is going to be ok, we've got people out there saying this is going to be ok' (interview with Haythorpe, 2021 [AEU]).[247]

> Their work probably gave permission to the government to have some political courage (interview with Spencer, 2021 [CSA]).

> I think at the time, the data that [Goss] was producing and the arguments that he was framing were actually quite influential and powerful in informing the public discourse around it. […] In terms of prosecuting the argument in the public's mind, I think Grattan was incredibly influential in doing that (interview with Colman, 2021 [ISA]).

> I think Grattan is incredibly good at framing policy problems and then offering policy solutions. They actually are very good at that. […]. I think that's a role that Grattan played, in the sense that they brought it into the public square (interview with Anonymous Interviewee G, 2021 [Catholic Education]).

Issue framing

The framing of school funding debates has long been contested. Competing actors have commonly promoted narratives focussing on the importance of 'choice' or the confrontation

[247] Haythorpe refers to the two minor party crossbenchers Nick Xenophon and Jacqui Lambie. Both voted in favour of the reforms.

of 'inequality'. The Grattan Institute – as the best-resourced actor aligned with the government – concentrated on the external frame ('public portrayals of the issue') and largely co-opted the 'equality' narrative traditionally advanced by the Labor Party and Australian Education Union (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, p. 1371). Grattan's *Circuit Breaker* (and subsequent reports) repeatedly makes the case that its proposals give 'all children a fair chance' (see, for example, Goss and Sonnemann, 2016, pp. 3, 7, 46; 2017b, 2017d). The Institute discerned that the historical Coalition mantra of 'choice' had been (at least partially) disrupted by the original 'needs-based, sector blind' Gonski report in 2011. The 'child equality' frame would also draw focus away from *Circuit Breaker's* proposed indexation reductions. Grattan wanted the public to focus on the 'ends' rather than the 'means'.

Grattan persistently advanced a second external frame. It positioned itself as a neutral interlocutor on a noble pursuit to 'end the funding wars' (see, for example, Goss, 2017b; Goss and Sonnemann, 2017c, 2017b). The phraseology evokes a war-weariness and encourages a rejection of the enmity surrounding the issue. Grattan wanted its broad audience to rise above the partisan rancour and embrace its reputedly impartial proposals.

Goss and Sonnemann balanced these broader appeals with more specific internal frames that focussed on the causes of the enduring funding problems (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, p. 1371). They consistently labelled incumbent school funding models a 'mess' – a morass of special deals and flawed designs – to shape policymakers' understanding of the problem (see, for example, Goss and Sonnemann, 2016, 2017b, 2017c). This 'disfunction' frame established the context for a more complete – and more exacting – discussion of incumbent policy shortcomings.

While advancing these frames, Grattan also embraced a deliberate and systematic plan to dismantle opposing arguments. Goss directly and publicly repudiated any challenge to his thesis – particularly those emerging from the Australian Education Union, National Catholic Education Commission, the Australian Labor Party, and the Centre for Independent Studies (Goss, 2017c, 2017a; Goss and Sonnemann, 2017a; Goss, 2021a). For Grattan to exert influence, Goss knew he had to defend the veracity of his contentions against attacks from powerful opposition groups.

The ALP, NCEC and AEU coalesced around one compelling counter-frame – that the Coalition's plans represented 'cuts' to education funding (see, for example, Gomes, 2017; Marin-Guzman, 2017). The ALP, in particular, would not countenance the Coalition's reputed

shift to the political centre. But some independent observers saw the 'funding cut' counter-narrative as strengthening Grattan's hold on the debate. Associate Professor Glenn Savage from the University of Western Australia contends that the Grattan Institute played an important role in the debate by 'calling out some of the myths that were going around' (interview, 2021). Savage asserts that the rejectionists were:

> Restating highly inaccurate, cherry-picked pieces of information […]. And I think people started to see through that and started to say, 'well, that's actually not true' […]. The Coalition never cut money. They continued to give more money. Sure, they didn't give money, or as much money, as if Labor had have stayed in power, but that's not a cut (interview, 2021).

Grattan's arguments had disturbed many of the 'settled understandings' on funding policy, especially when it came to Catholic schools funding (interview with Anonymous Interviewee G, 2021).[248] Similarly, the AEU saw Grattan's arguments as 'particularly problematic' and 'very dangerous' (interview with Haythorpe, 2021). Nevertheless, perceptions of Grattan's influence on the evolution of the reforms are divergent and nuanced. There is broad agreement that Grattan's proposals were pre-eminent and seductively packaged. But distinguishing Grattan's role in a field of well-established actors on an issue that has been debated for decades is less straightforward. Prasser asserts that Grattan's 'ideas were certainly in the mix of discussions', but they were 'one of several contributors' (interview, 2021a). Rob Nairn, the former Executive Director of the Australian Secondary Principals Association, additionally proffers:

> I wouldn't downplay the influence of Grattan, but there's a lot of other players in there. As I said, Grattan spoke to a lot of groups. They were representing the views that they had collected from a lot of different groups (interview, 2021).

And an anonymous interviewee from Catholic Education agrees:

> Ultimately, while Grattan was influential on some matters and certain points in the debate, they were not the biggest influence on the final outcome (interview, 2021).

[248] These 'settled understandings' concord with Baumgartner and Jones' (2009) idea of policy stasis, and any disruption of this equilibrium can result in large-scale policy change (as per Grattan's proposals).

10.5 Conclusions

Any assessment of the Grattan Institute's influence on the 2017 school funding reforms needs to contemplate a distinguishing issue characteristic. With or without Grattan's involvement, the issue would have become both a political priority and a policy priority (perhaps straining the Shiffman and Smith framework). This evolution is out of necessity – the government had no choice but to revisit the legislation given its limited commitment to the incumbent funding model (under Prime Minister Abbott). Grattan's role must therefore be explained within this context.

It is instructive to break Grattan's involvement on the issue into two stages: first, from the release of *Circuit Breaker* in November 2016, and second, from the announcement of the government's proposed legislation in May 2017.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which *Circuit Breaker's* three central recommendations influenced government thinking during the development of the *Australian Education Amendment Bill*. But several points stand out. First, the original *Gonski Review* (2011) contained the idea to create an independent governance body (incarnated as the National Schools Resourcing Board). Second, Grattan largely abandoned its 'expert teacher' proposal in later publications, instead favouring a more specific concentration on funding. Third, and most importantly, the recommended reductions in funding indexation rates had equivocal origins. It is evident that Grattan's research and analysis extensively elevated the thinking around indexation. And this analysis – both accessible and sophisticated – might have been new to some of the crucial actors in the debate (for example, minor-party crossbenchers). But there are apparent antecedents to the notion that indexation rates needed to be reduced (see, for example, Harrington, 2017a).

So, when applying the Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework, it is apparent that Grattan inceptively attracted political attention at the first stage of its involvement (the production of *Circuit Breaker* in November 2016). The government seized upon Grattan's proposals (and referenced them within parliament) to provide intellectual ballast for its intimated funding reductions. *Circuit Breaker's* proposed indexation diminution also prompted a swift rebuke from the opposition Labor Party (see, for example, Knott, 2016). However, it is not possible to assert that the report *caused the issue* to evolve into a political and policy priority, or that it directly impacted the government's policy development.

During the second stage of its involvement (after the launch of the government's plans in May 2017), Grattan's role invites similarly varied interpretations. The Institute's submission to the Senate Inquiry was prominent during the Public Hearings and formed the basis of Grattan's advocacy over May and June 2017. The assented Act ultimately included the three primary amendments contained in Grattan's Inquiry submission. Nevertheless, Grattan's exact influence on the shape of the legislation – and the crossbench vote – remains indeterminate. There is a strong correlation between Grattan's scholarship and the policy outcome, but a causal claim could only be validated through unequivocal testimony from crossbenchers themselves.

Grattan's early contributions to the disrupted school funding debate solidly established it as an informed voice and a central actor in the policy process. The Institute helped to legitimate the government's proposals in the public arena *through the advocacy of its concordant work* and therefore – at a minimum – helped establish the government's proposals as the preferred policy framework (while observing that the issue was essentially a preordained *policy priority*). All of those interviewed for this case – all pivotal actors in the prosecution of the issue – profess to Grattan's influence in this regard. Grattan's stature as a sophisticated purveyor of non-partisan research positioned it as an authoritative voice in the public sphere on the side of the government's reforms.

Two other points stand out. First, not only did Grattan's advocacy help to legitimate the government's proposals, but the Liberal Party itself actively leveraged Grattan's status and reputation (and concordant policy prescriptions) to buttress its arguments. The government would only have done so if it believed that the Grattan name would help to influence the perceptions of its proposals. Second, the case highlights Grattan's strategic acuity. The Institute rapidly pivoted to an issue on which it believed it could immediately impact policy formulation, supplementing its longer-term agenda-setting efforts in the field. Grattan's generous resource base permitted this seamless shift in focus, with its dedicated scholars readily able to tackle emerging issues while still supporting existing programs.

Chapter Eleven: Australia's Diplomatic Deficit

11.1 Introduction

In 2009, the Lowy Institute for International Policy – an international affairs think tank – painted a bleak picture of Australia's international policy infrastructure. Lowy reported that the number of Australian-based staff employed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) had fallen 20 per cent since 1996 and that Australian-based ('A-based') staff serving offshore had fallen 25 per cent over the same period (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, pp. 22, 24). DFAT had fewer overseas missions than almost all OECD countries (and smaller than all G-20 nations) and a budget that had progressively decayed to only 5 per cent of the Defence Department's (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, pp. vii, 19; A. Oliver and Shearer, 2011, p. viii). Lowy asserted that Australia had reared a 'diplomatic deficit', whereby its overseas network was 'overstretched and hollowed out' and in need of 'urgent action to rebuild the intellectual infrastructure' required to prosecute Australia's interests in the international sphere (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, p. viii).

The founding Executive Director of the Lowy Institute, Allan Gyngell, himself having had a lengthy career in Australia's foreign service[249], lamented the lack of attention to Australia's instruments of foreign policy:

> My own long-held view [is] that Australia doesn't really do foreign policy very well. We don't understand that particular slice of statecraft, which is where the role is to manage differences between actors in the international system in ways that advance our interests and protect our values (interview with Gyngell, 2020).

At Gyngell's behest, the Lowy Institute embarked on a mission to redress DFAT's perceived resource inadequacies and heighten the value ascribed to the department's services.

This chapter examines the Lowy Institute's influence on the resources afforded the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Lowy Institute has produced research and commentary on this issue for over a decade. But the analysis here focuses on the period commencing in 2009 (when Lowy first published on the issue) up to 2015, when the Foreign

[249] Gyngell served as an Australian diplomat in Rangoon, Singapore, and Washington D.C.

Minister Julie Bishop undertook what she termed 'the single largest expansion of Australia's diplomatic network in forty years' (Parliament of Australia, 2015).

The chapter finds that Lowy played a discernible and influential role in the debate. Lowy positioned the issue on the political agenda and was primarily responsible for establishing a *political* priority. Nonetheless, Lowy has not been able to establish a *policy* priority. There has been progress on several of Lowy's proposals, but DFAT has not received the required funding to redress the decay that Lowy identified.

11.2 Methods

This chapter primarily draws upon data from ten semi-structured interviews. The chapter uses the snowball technique to identify Individual interviewees, with the Lowy Institute Director of Research, Alex Oliver, the initial interviewee. The chapter shows that there is only one 'side' on this issue and, as such, required fewer interviews to reach the point of saturation (Baumgartner et al., 2009, p. 6). The interview's averaged twenty-nine minutes with a standard deviation of thirteen minutes. All interviewees agreed to their identification.

Primary and secondary document analysis also plays an important role in the case. These documents include reports from the Lowy Institute, Commonwealth government Hansard and committee reports, print media articles, and additional academic research.

11.3 Lowy Institute: Background

The Lowy Institute stands out as one of Australia's most prominent think tanks and alone dominates the field of international affairs. The Australian billionaire Sir Frank Lowy AC established the institute in 2003 and remains (via The Lowy Foundation) the institute's primary benefactor (Lowy, 2021a).[250] Since its inception, the Lowy Institute has hosted every Australian prime minister and foreign minister, all lured by the organisation's high profile and non-partisan posture (Lowy, 2021c).

The Lowy Institute primarily targets a sophisticated, foreign policy-literate audience (interview with A. Oliver, 2019). But the Institute is perhaps best known (publicly) for its annual *Lowy Institute Poll,* conducted every year since 2005. The *Poll* tracks public opinion on foreign affairs issues and is a way of 'drawing Australians into the conversation' on the

[250] To be clear, all references to 'Lowy' in this chapter refer to the Institute itself and not to Sir Frank Lowy.

'constraints and opportunities' available in the international arena (interview with A. Oliver, 2019; Lowy, 2021b).

Lowy asserts that it does not foster an institutional perspective. Its scholars are free to develop their own views, and those views are purportedly distinctive and independent (interview with A. Oliver, 2019; Lowy, 2021c). Nevertheless, the present case has a distinctly institutional perspective. Multiple Lowy researchers have contributed to the institute's body of scholarship on the issue, and they uniformly urge the government to redress the purportedly unacceptable circumstances DFAT encounters.

11.4 Australia's Overseas Representation

11.4.1 Issue Characteristics

Australia's commitment to its international infrastructure has long been a concern to those managing its foreign affairs. In 1986, the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Stuart Harris, asserted:

> The pressures on [DFA's] resources in most avenues of overseas representation already mean that we are falling short of our capacity to achieve some of our international objectives. […]. The choice for Australia is between accepting the required costs of effective overseas representation or accepting less independence for the country as a whole […] and ultimately a greater risk to its values and its values system, and to its material welfare (S. Harris, 1986, pp. 213, 219).

But Harris' *Review of Australia's Overseas Representation* was the last of its kind for two decades. Noting the hiatus, the Lowy Institute resolved to re-examine the circumstances in 2008 – and it discerned an alarming and accelerating decay.[251] While the complexity within the international arena had escalated, Lowy contended that successive Australian governments had presided over a systematic diminution of the nation's diplomatic capabilities, rendering them 'outdated and inadequate' as a result of 'two decades of neglect' (A. Oliver and Shearer, 2011, pp. vi, x).

Lowy asserts that Australia is a legitimate middle power and that it should actively pursue its interests in the international arena (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, p. vii). But its 2009 report, entitled *Australia's Diplomatic Deficit,* highlighted the disjunction between Australia's

[251] Lowy commenced its investigation into Australia's 'diplomatic deficit' in July 2008 but released its final report in March 2009 (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, p. v).

international standing – as the world's thirteenth most globalised nation – and its investment in the 'instruments of international policy' (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, pp. vii, 4). For example, at the time of the 2009 report, Australia had the world's sixth most traded currency, the twelfth largest defence budget, the thirteenth largest aid budget, and the fifteenth largest economy. Yet, at the same time, Australia supported a diplomatic network of only ninety-one offshore missions versus an OECD average of one-hundred-and-fifty. Only four small OECD nations had smaller representations. Further, the proportion of 'small posts' (those with three or fewer A-based DFAT staff) rose from 26 per cent in 1986 to 40 per cent in 2008. Home-based staff serving in Australia's offshore missions averaged just 24 per cent versus 50 per cent for G8 countries. And DFAT's 'true-operating budget' had declined every year from 1999 until 2009 (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, pp. 19-26). In sum, the report points to 'significant shortcomings' in Australia's 'hollowed out' diplomatic service (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, p. 47).

Lowy asserts that the Australian public assigns little value to DFAT's 'abstract and intangible' mandate (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, p. 1). And without a 'natural domestic constituency', politicians can continue to neglect DFAT's resource requirements with ballot-box impunity (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, p. 2). But some of Australia's prominent former diplomats have proffered alternative reasons for DFAT's relative standing in the departmental hierarchy (and funding stakes). Australia's former Ambassador to Israel (and incumbent Federal MP), Dave Sharma, authored a controversial piece in *The Interpreter*[252] arguing that DFAT's circumstances were largely of its own doing:

> We spend roughly $28 billion per year on defence but only $1 billion per year on diplomacy. In significant part, this has been down to a failure of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the Canberra bureaucratic struggle for budget and resources. It has failed to sell its value to the political class, to cultivate champions within the Cabinet, or position itself with solutions to the government's challenges (Sharma, 2020).

But in a rejoinder published in *The Interpreter* just three days later, James Wise, Australia's former Ambassador to Thailand, challenged Sharma's thesis.[253] Wise insisted that Sharma placed 'too much responsibility onto public servants and not enough responsibility on the political class in dealing with this problem' (interview with Wise, 2020a). Wise proclaimed:

[252] *The Interpreter* is the Lowy Institute's web-based blog. It provides daily commentary on items of interest in world affairs.

[253] James Wise is also the former head of DFAT's Corporate Management division.

> The DFAT Secretary and staff have no political muscle. As public servants, they cannot criticise the government. So they have rarely raised the department's resourcing issues with scholars or media commentators and, through them, the wider public. If they have, scholars and commentators have referred to them as "unnamed sources" – sources easily ignored or disbelieved (Wise, 2020b).

Allan Gyngell, the former Executive Director of the Lowy Institute (who became the Director-General of the Office of National Assessments following his six years at Lowy), aligns with Wise, stating that he is 'personally uncomfortable with the idea that government departments should be responsible for advocating for their own resources' (Galloway, 2020). So, while the reasons for DFAT's underfunding might be in dispute, there is little dissension regarding the allegation that DFAT is indeed underfunded. DFAT's resource cuts have been 'a bipartisan trend' despite both sides of politics publicly identifying the need for redress (interview with Varghese, 2021). In other words, there has only been one 'side' to this debate (Baumgartner et al., 2009, pp. 57-58). There has been a complete absence of a counter-narrative and no serious counter-mobilisation to challenge Lowy's thesis.

The issue also attracted little political attention prior to Lowy's engagement. As a result, Lowy assessed that the issue required a public intervention to elevate its political salience. Lowy sought to make the issue a *policy* priority to redress the continued degradation; a priority high enough to prompt action by the federal government's Expenditure Review Committee, 'which is where it counts – where the money gets handed out' (interview with A. Oliver, 2020). Nonetheless, the nature of the issue meant Lowy would need to overcome substantial obstacles to influence government policy. It is difficult to evidence the negative impacts of the DFAT budget cuts. Moreover, the 'average Australian' was unlikely to identify any discernible consequences. Lowy's detailed prescriptions may have been well-argued, clearly implementable, and consistently measurable, but inadequate political salience would make it difficult to overcome the 'frictions in the political process' (Baumgartner et al., 2009, pp. 113, 120). The case possessed a strong status-quo bias from the outset.

11.4.2 Political Context

The funding of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has not been a partisan battleground like many other political issues. Funding cuts have commonly occurred under both Coalition and Labor governments (A. Oliver and Shearer, 2011, p. 6; A. Oliver, 2013a; Wise, 2020c). And both major political parties have reckoned that the quantum of DFAT

funding has limited public interest. So, despite some minor point-scoring by incoming Foreign Ministers, the lack of public, political and media attention has allowed the issue to fester (Baumgartner et al., 2009; interview with Hanson, 2021). Nevertheless, attracting attention to DFAT's deteriorating circumstances was eminently achievable for a sophisticated and well-resourced policy institute. Lowy's more substantial challenge was to convert that political attention into a *political* priority, and thereafter a *policy* priority. Policy priorities are characterised by political action (where governments enact policies and allocate resources), but the path from attention to priority often requires the emergence of a discernible policy window (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, p. 1370). In the present case, 'focusing' events that might open policy windows are difficult to foresee or define (see Kingdon, 2011, p. 169). Lowy had ambitious plans, but conditions were not particularly conducive to policy prioritisations.

Kevin Rudd's election as Australian Prime Minister in December 2007 might have represented an opportunity for Lowy. Rudd came into office with an 'ambitious foreign policy agenda' and asserted that '[Australia's] diplomacy must be the best in the world' (Rudd, 2008; Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009). Rudd declared that the increasing complexity of the international environment had 'not been reflected in the historical resourcing of the Australian foreign service relative to comparable governments around the world' and that 'this must change' (Rudd, 2008). Regardless, Lowy's Director of Research, Alex Oliver, rejects the idea that Rudd's election might have motivated Lowy's pursuit of this issue (interview with A. Oliver, 2020). Lowy initiated its *Diplomatic Deficit* report in 2008 but Oliver asserts that even John Howard's re-election would not have altered Lowy's intentions (interview, 2020).[254]

Table 11.1 details the release dates of Lowy's most substantial reports on Australia's diplomatic deficit, in addition to the key political responses and events over the examined period.

[254] Allan Gyngell asserts that the report was motivated by his desire to 'do something specifically about the instruments of Australian foreign policy because I thought it was an underexplored area of Australian statecraft' (interview, 2020). Alex Oliver also points to Andrew Shearer's appointment as Lowy's new Director of Studies as an impetus for the report (interview, 2020).

Table 11-1: Reports and events on Australia's diplomatic deficit

Date Published	Report or Event Name	Entity	Responsible Party
2009 – March	*Diplomatic Deficit*	Lowy Institute	Blue Ribbon Panel (and Lowy staff)
2010 – November	*A Digital DFAT*	Lowy Institute	Fergus Hanson
2011 – July	*Review of DFAT Annual Report – 2009/10*	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade	Michael Danby MP (Chair)
2011 – August	*Diplomatic Disrepair*	Lowy Institute	Alex Oliver and Andrew Shearer
2012 – October	*Australia's Overseas Representation*	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade	Nick Champion MP (Chair)
2013 – March	*Consular Conundrum*	Lowy Institute	Alex Oliver
2013 – June	*Capability Review: DFAT*	Australian Public Service Commission	Allan Gyngell (Chair – Review Team)
2013 – September	*The Coalition's Policy for Foreign Affairs*	Coalition	Coalition
2013 – September	Federal Election	Coalition (elected)	Tony Abbott
2014 – December	*DFAT Consular Strategy – 2014-16*	DFAT	Julie Bishop (Foreign Minister)
2015 – May	Federal Budget	DFAT (Portfolio Budget)	Julie Bishop (Foreign Minister)
2015 – August	Australian Diplomacy Today Symposium	AIIA; ANU; Bond University	Multiple

The table details several key points that illuminate the contemporaneous political context. First, the Labor Party remained in government from 2007 until 2013. Lowy authored all of its major reports on DFAT's resourcing (and capabilities) during this period. Second, two unwelcome circumstances complicated the politics of the period. Prime Minister Rudd's leadership style had created extensive discord within the Labor Party, resulting in successive leadership spills and fostering an uncertain and dysfunctional governance period (Economou, 2014; Walter, 2014). Additionally, reverberations from the Global Financial Crisis (2007-2009) dominated the political and economic landscape (RBA, n/d). The Labor government responded to the crisis with a Keynesian-inspired expansionary fiscal policy which ushered in Australia's largest budget deficit-to-GDP since World War Two (RBA, 2021).[255] Although Australia avoided a recession, the resultant conservative backlash against Labor's supposed profligacy was as swift as it was predictable. The federal Coalition and conservative media commentators relentlessly criticised Labor for its perceived budget extravagance (see, for

[255] The budget deficit-to-GDP in 2008/09 was 4.2 per cent. This deficit is forecast to be eclipsed (under the Coalition government) in the year ended June 30, 2021, due to the extensive Covid-19 fiscal measures (Holmes and Packham, 2020; RBA, 2021).

example, Akerman, 2010; Scott, 2011; The Australian [editorial], 2011; Turnbull, 2011). As such, this unfavourable timing hobbled Lowy's push for increased spending in an area that garnered little public interest.

Table 11.1 also highlights the political attention that Lowy generated during successive Labor administrations (under Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard). The ALP convened two Joint Standing Committee (JSC) inquiries into Australia's foreign policy infrastructure over this period. The 2011 inquiry – a review of the 'DFAT Annual Report' – was the first of its kind since 2001. The 2012 inquiry – a full inquiry into 'Australia's Overseas Representation', as recommended by the 2011 inquiry – was the first since the Harris Review in 1986. The attention that Lowy generated had quickly morphed into a *political* priority. That is, the government had mobilised 'official institutions and wider political systems', and a significant cohort of elected representatives expressed 'sustained concern on the issue' (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, p. 1370; Baker et al., 2017, p. 142).

The successive JSC inquiries strongly favoured an augmentation of Australia's foreign policy infrastructure, substantially aligning with Lowy's central thesis. But Lowy's *Diplomatic Disrepair* report – its second major report in the series, issued one month after the first JSC inquiry in 2011 – concluded that while 'some modest initial steps had been taken' in response to Lowy's 2009 *Diplomatic Deficit* report, 'much more needed to be done' (A. Oliver and Shearer, 2011, p. 22). The prevailing circumstances during this period did not permit the *political* priority (that Lowy had helped to create) to become an immediate government *policy* priority.

The final noteworthy point highlighted in Table 11.1 is the potential opening of a policy window following the Coalition government's election in 2013. The Coalition had gone into the election with a policy to 'provide adequate diplomatic and consular services' and had formally noted the Lowy Institute's work on Australia's 'relatively low diplomatic presence around the world' (The Coalition, 2013, p. 7). Lowy had a new opportunity to press its case with a potentially welcoming audience. And the Institute actively promoted its ideas to the incoming Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, even before she officially took her seat. Fergus Hanson – another of Lowy's primary authors in the diplomatic deficit series – states that Lowy 'regularly briefed both sides of politics, but I remember multiple briefings with Julie when she

was the Shadow [Minister]. So, she was well and truly across our issues' (interview, 2021).[256] Lowy had very evidently attracted Bishop's attention at an early stage. In a speech given at the Lowy Institute's Sydney headquarters in 2015, Foreign Minister Bishop stated, 'when I took on the role as Australia's Foreign Minister in September of 2013, I will admit that the words of two important Lowy Institute research papers were ringing in my ears' (Bishop, 2015). In December 2014, Foreign Minister Bishop released the DFAT *Consular Strategy* report. The report incorporated measures substantially similar to those contained in Alex Oliver's preceding submission to the government's 'invitation to comment' (A. Oliver, 2014).[257]

The extent of Lowy's influence would also pivot on senior bureaucrats' receptiveness to Lowy's arguments and advocacy. Interview data reveals that DFAT officers, particularly those based offshore, responded positively to Lowy's engagement. Former DFAT Secretary Peter Varghese asserts that Lowy's engagement was well-received: 'Oh yes, absolutely. Look, I think everyone in DFAT, whether they were at home or abroad at diplomatic posts, welcomed the Lowy report and hoped, I think, that it would lead to an increase in the budget' (interview, 2021).[258] Allan Gyngell noted that DFAT officers were 'very happy that someone was writing about it' (interview, 2020). Former diplomat James Wise declared that 'people were pleased that at last you had on the public record an effort, and a well-argued effort, by people to try to get the department more resources. So, I think on the whole people were very pleased that there was this sort of argumentation out there' (interview, 2020a). Fellow diplomat David Engel concurs: 'the people I were talking to at the time within the department were pleased with what Lowy was saying. Lowy was making the point – pretty well – that we all felt needed to be made' (interview, 2021).

But one interviewee asserts that the reaction at the most senior departmental level was not all positive.[259] The interviewee suggests that 'there was absolutely that kind of thinking [at the senior level of DFAT], that this was a criticism of the organisation and not a supportive gesture.' In this regard, Dennis Richardson's response to a question from Nick Champion, the

[256] The Australian Strategic Policy Institute employs Fergus Hanson at the time of the interview.
[257] The measures included expectations that travellers would address their own travel insurance requirements and would take personal responsibility for their actions while abroad. DFAT might also require travellers to reimburse it for services provided, depending on the circumstance.
[258] Peter Varghese was Secretary of DFAT from 2012-2016 (UQ, 2021).
[259] This interviewee has approved identification but has been anonymised here to mitigate the possibility of blowback.

Chair of the JSC inquiry into 'Australia's Overseas Representation', is worth noting.[260] Champion invited Richardson to respond to the Lowy Institute's 'criticism' of Australia's 'diplomatic footprint'. Richardson responded, 'Lowy is not telling the department anything it does not know, and Lowy is not saying anything that the department itself has not been drawing attention to' (Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2012, pp. 1-2). So, the political environment might not have been as obvious or as welcoming as Lowy might have anticipated.

11.4.3 Actor Power

The effectiveness of Australia's diplomatic infrastructure is not front-of-mind for most Australians. Indeed, Lowy's scholars understood that they were unlikely to attract vocal public support. If Lowy were to generate a policy response it would ultimately need to convince the Party room, the Cabinet, and the Expenditure Review Committee about its contentions. To do so would require all of Lowy's intellectual capacity, policy experience, and strategic acuity. It would also need to mobilise other authoritative actors.

The Lowy Institute recognised that it needed to provide leadership on this issue (see Shiffman and Smith, 2007, p. 1371). This presumption reflected the Institute's belief that DFAT could not and should not be in the business of publicly arguing for increased resources. As such, Lowy discerned it had a civil society responsibility to argue the case in the public sphere, in suitably 'attention-grabbing and colourful terms' (interview with Gyngell, 2020). But as respected as it was – even after a short five-year history – Lowy understood that it needed other credible voices supporting its submissions.

The 2009 *Diplomatic Deficit* report was issued by a 'Blue Ribbon Panel' rather than specifically identifying individual Lowy authors. The Panel consisted of six eminent Australians, only one of whom was employed by the Lowy Institute (the Panel Chairman, Allan Gyngell). Four of the other five panel members were recipients of the *Order of Australia* medal, demonstrating the Panel's esteemed status.[261] Lowy selected the Panel members based on their individual experiences within the public service, business, and academic communities. It endeavoured to elevate the issue's salience by engaging 'influential parts of the community' who might succeed in influencing their elite government peers (interview with Gyngell, 2020).

[260] Dennis Richardson was Secretary of DFAT from 2009-2012 (DFAT, 2010, 2013).
[261] The five non-Lowy panel members included: Jillian Broadbent AO, Professor William Maley AM, Brad Orgill, Professor Peter Shergold AC, and Ric Smith AO (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009).

In essence, Lowy had established the equivalent of an independent expert inquiry to amplify the report's legitimacy.

The willingness of these high-profile actors to endorse a report that would be substantially researched and drafted by Lowy scholars reflects the Institute's capabilities and prestige. The Institute had become a prominent voice in the international affairs arena and one that politicians were unlikely to ignore. Lowy had also developed a strong media presence. The print media cited the *Diplomatic Deficit* report on eleven occasions in 2009 following its March release – a laudable number given the topic's esoteric nature.[262] The participation of these eminent Australians undoubtedly encouraged the media's attention, but it was through other means that Lowy most forcefully made its case.

The Lowy Institute's financial wherewithal facilitated the broad dissemination of its ideas, thereby ensuring those ideas reached their primary target audiences: elected politicians and senior public servants. Lowy produced ten reports between 2009 and 2013 focusing on DFAT's resources. These reports included thick, technocratic research reports (the *Diplomatic Deficit* report contained eighty-seven pages of dense analysis and policy recommendations), shorter 'Policy Briefs', and multiple articles on *The Interpreter*. In 2016, Lowy developed a sophisticated digital interactive tool called the 'Global Diplomacy Index', which 'visualises the diplomatic networks of sixty-one G20, OECD and Asian countries' (Lowy, 2016b). This dynamic tool – updated in 2017 and 2019 – allows users to examine country-by-country diplomatic representations and rankings. It firmly establishes Lowy as the principal non-governmental commentator in the field and the go-to data repository on diplomatic networks.

Lowy's political access would be a key determinant of success. Public apathy and limited civil society mobilisation left the Institute playing (mostly) a lone hand, thereby elevating the importance of its direct engagement efforts. Lowy's reputation as a credible, informed, and intellectually independent actor paved the way for these engagements. And the Institute attracted bureaucratic interest before it had even published its first report, demonstrating that influence can manifest quietly, out of the public eye, rather than in the public sphere.

Several high-ranking DFAT officials invited Andrew Shearer[263] and Alex Oliver – two of Lowy's principal authors on the issue – to Canberra to discuss Lowy's work in progress. These

[262] This Factiva search was executed on February 14, 2021, with search criteria 'Lowy' *AND* 'diplomatic deficit' for the period January 1, 2009, to December 31, 2020.
[263] Andrew Shearer became the Director-General of the Office of National Intelligence on December 18, 2020.

officials included Doug Chester (the incumbent Deputy Secretary of DFAT), James Wise (the incumbent Head of DFAT's Corporate Management Division), and David Engel (DFAT's incumbent Assistant Secretary Global Issues).[264] James Wise explains:

> We, of course, were wrestling with these resource's issues for the department all of the time […]. We were delighted in the department to find out that there was a think tank interested in this issue and going to, we hoped, pinpoint some of the problems – the resourcing problems – that the department faced. And we gave them as much information as we responsibly and professionally could, but also gave them some ideas which they hadn't, I think, come across at that stage where they may be able to get a bit more data (interview, 2020a).

Lowy's deep ties to the department are readily evident. The former DFAT Secretary Peter Varghese identifies Lowy as an important interlocutor on Australia's international affairs, corroborating Lowy's privileged position:

> I mean, DFAT and Lowy have a very close relationship, and I used to meet with Lowy quite regularly and would attend functions; would have talks with them. So, it was quite a close relationship (interview, 2021).

Lowy was well-positioned to lead on this issue, and it needed to. The level of non-government participation in the 2011 and 2012 JSC inquiries evidences Lowy's relative standing. Lowy dominated the public hearings that formed part of the 2011 inquiry. Of the total two-hundred-and-three minutes of testimony, Lowy Institute scholars Alex Oliver and Fergus Hanson separately testified for a combined seventy-three minutes – 36 per cent of the total. Only six non-government witnesses received invitations to appear at the hearing (including Oliver and Hanson). The final Committee report cited Oliver and Hanson twenty-nine times and individually referenced each more than any other non-government witness (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p. 1; Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2011).[265]

The 2011 public hearings also reveal the degree to which MPs embraced Lowy's ideas on DFAT's funding and capabilities. For instance, in an exchange with the incumbent DFAT Secretary, Dennis Richardson, veteran Liberal MP Philip Ruddock declared that 'the Lowy paper goes into it [in] far more substance than your submission' (Commonwealth of Australia,

[264] James Wise and David Engel confirmed this meeting. Wise also identified Shearer's and Chester's attendance. Oliver's attendance is less certain, although Wise believes this to be the case. Oliver could not directly recall this particular meeting due to her large number of meetings at the time (interviews with A. Oliver, 2020; Wise, 2020a; Engel, 2021).

[265] The citation count excludes duplicate footnote references.

2012b, p. 8). For some, Lowy was a more persuasive informant on DFAT's circumstances than the department itself.

Lowy's contributions to the two JSC inquiries were repeatedly noted at the respective public hearings. Comments by the Chairman of the 2011 Inquiry, Michael Danby MP, are particularly noteworthy:

> I commend you [Alex Oliver] and the Lowy Institute for *making this an issue* that has begun to be discussed and should be pushed a lot further, whether it is by diplomats, us, or other people. I think everyone should draw on the context of the picture that you draw of Australia's representation overseas, and that I have experienced, and be on the same wavelength that the Lowy Institute is (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012b, p. 14, italics added).

Lowy similarly dominates the 2012 inquiry; perhaps even more so. The final Committee report references the Institute a startling ninety-five times (in addition to individual references to Lowy's Andrew Shearer, Alex Oliver and Fergus Hanson). Further, comments at the public hearings by the Committee Chair, Nick Champion MP, illustrate the degree to which Lowy influenced the Committee's thinking. In the second paragraph of his opening monologue formally launching the hearings, Champion directly cites Lowy's submission, and states:

> Witnesses from DFAT appearing today will be able to respond to these and other issues which have been raised by Lowy, as well as other contributors to this inquiry (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012b, p. 1).

It is, therefore, no surprise that the JSC inquiries' outcomes and recommendations are substantially consistent with Lowy's findings and recommendations. The overarching themes in the committee reports are wholly accordant with Lowy's propositions. For example, the committees noted:

- '[Australia's] poor relative standing in the number of diplomatic posts' (Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2011, p. vii);
- that 'the Committee is not satisfied with DFAT's public diplomacy efforts' (Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2011, p. vi);
- the 'chronic underfunding of DFAT' (Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2012, p. vii);
- a 'diplomatic network which is seriously deficient' (Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2012, p. vii); and,

- that the 'budget priority for overseas representation should be significantly raised' (Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2012, p. vii).

Lowy's scholarship and the Committee reports specifically overlap in numerous areas, including:

- the recommendation to increase the number of diplomatic posts 'by at least twenty' (see Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, p. x; Shearer et al., 2011, p. 15; Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2012, p. 25); and,
- the recommendation that DFAT establishes a new Office of e-Diplomacy (Shearer et al., 2011, p. 16; Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2012, p. 123).

While Lowy led the campaign to augment DFAT's resource base, few others followed. Noting the absence of broader participation, Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee member Philip Ruddock thanked Lowy's Andrew Shearer and Alex Oliver for their 'excellent submission', but lamented, 'I am sorry, in a sense, it is very much alone' (Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee, 2012, p. 16). The lack of business community participation and representation particularly stands out. Interestingly, the sole submission by a large Australian corporate (ANZ Bank) to the 2012 inquiry conspicuously drew upon content from Lowy's prior scholarship (Thursby, 2011).

Similarly, the academic community had little to say in the early years of the debate.[266] It was not until 2015 that university scholars coalesced around the issue by convening the *Australian Diplomacy Today Symposium*, supported by a *Special Issue* in the *Australian Journal of International Affairs*. Oddly, the introductory article in the *AJIA Special Issue* asserted that 'the study of the dynamics and developments underscoring Australia's contemporary diplomatic practice has in this country been largely neglected' and, as such, the *Special Issue* sought to 'prompt an ongoing conversation' in this regard (Byrne et al., 2016, p. 581). Yet only two months before the *Symposium*, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop extensively referenced (in a press release and speech) Lowy's 'important' work on the same topic, legitimising the government's intended expansion of Australia's diplomatic network (Bishop, 2015; M. Harris, 2015). Further, the opening article in the *Special Issue* directly borrows from Lowy's two thick

[266] Melissa Conley-Tyler recently revisited the thesis in *Australian Foreign Affairs* (Tyler, 2019).

reports on the topic – *Diplomatic Deficit* (2009) and *Diplomatic Disrepair* (2011) – by stating 'while most authors associated with this issue argue that Australian diplomacy is far from a state of *disrepair*, many agree that it remains in deep *deficit*', without acknowledging the contextual origins of that phraseology (Byrne et al., 2016, p. 588, italics added). Lowy's work had evidently created a lasting impression.

The primary interlocutors on this policy issue comprise of policy community experts. And this narrow community of experts constitute what Peter Haas (1992) imagined as an epistemic community.[267] The Lowy Institute and sympathetic legislators (mainly Committee members) shared beliefs regarding the causes and implications of the issue and concurred on the policy solutions. Ultimately, Lowy and the Joint Standing Committees aligned on the need to augment Australia's diplomatic infrastructure. But there was an absence of collective, coordinated action by reform proponents in the non-governmental sphere (despite the Blue Ribbon Panel's aspirations). The development of a broader, coordinated coalition – including the business community and other NGO stakeholders – might have been decisive, encouraging the issue's path to *policy* priority status. In the absence of broader engagement, Lowy needed to comprehensively leverage its cognitive competencies. Lowy's power came from its expertise and ideas. The Institute succeeded in attracting attention and establishing a *political* priority despite its largely solitary efforts in the non-government domain.

11.4.4 Ideas

The Lowy argument

The Lowy Institute did not lack ambition when it commenced its campaign in 2008. The *Diplomatic Deficit* report laid out 'a comprehensive plan to rebase and refocus [Australia's] instruments of international policy' (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, p. v). And a comprehensive plan it was. Lowy presented more than forty proposals and recommendations to tackle the circumstances impacting DFAT's effectiveness. These recommendations were readily distinguishable, and many were measurable – a feature of Lowy's body of scholarship on the issue. Lowy's objectives were also clear. It sought to:

[267] Chapter Twelve more specifically discusses policy networks and the similarities and differences across the three case studies.

> Stimulate public debate about whether Australia has the tools it needs to prosecute its interests […] and start building a domestic constituency for Australian diplomacy (Shearer, 2009).

So, while Lowy was comprehensive and specific in its policy prescriptions, its goals appeared to more modestly target the early stages of the policy cycle. That is, Lowy's content seemed to target policy formulation, but its stated objectives were to define an issue and set an agenda. On what basis should Lowy's influence be assessed?

Alex Oliver suggests that the 2009 *Diplomatic Deficit* report was 'broader, less specific' (but no less comprehensive) than the subsequent 2011 *Diplomatic Disrepair* report (interview, 2020). Nevertheless, the *Diplomatic Disrepair* report directly assesses the 'progress, if any, [the] government has made in rebuilding our diplomatic infrastructure since the time of our *Diplomatic Deficit* report' (A. Oliver and Shearer, 2011, p. v). That is, the 2011 report actually evaluates the policy impact of the original 2009 work – a significant advancement on agenda-setting. Table 11.2 identifies the government's policy response to some of Lowy's *Diplomatic Deficit* proposals (as documented in *Diplomatic Disrepair)*. At a minimum, the table evidences a correlation between Lowy's proposals and some of the initial policy advances.

Table 11-2: Government response to Diplomatic Deficit report

Proposal in *Diplomatic Deficit* (2009)	**Assessment in *Diplomatic Disrepair* (2011)**	**Additional Comment**
Seventy-five additional 'A-based' staff over 3 years across diplomatic missions	Fifty-five new diplomatic positions created	
Twenty new diplomatic missions over 10 years	Four new missions created	According to Lowy's Global Diplomacy Index, twenty-three new missions had been created in the decade to 2019
Forty per cent of 'A-based' staff (excluding passport staff) to be posted offshore	The per cent had fallen from 24 per cent in 2009 to 23.6 per cent in 2011	
A one-off injection of funds to boost pool of consular staff	Four million dollars contained in the 2011/12 federal budget	
Invest in public diplomacy	No change	
Invest in new media	Tentative steps toward adoption of e-diplomacy tools	
Major investment in language skills	Sixty-nine per cent increase	

Lowy's *Diplomatic Disrepair* report concluded that the Institute's policy influence had been modest. As a consequence, Lowy resolved to sharpen its focus in subsequent

scholarship. Alex Oliver highlights this narrowing focus in order to demonstrate the evolution of Lowy's research:

> Once we'd honed in on the overseas network and diplomacy aspect of it, yes, we got more specific with the recommendations. […] That's exactly what we should be doing as a policy think tank (interview, 2020).

This evolution is readily discernible in successive reports. *Diplomatic Deficit* (2009) was all-encompassing, addressing Australia's diplomatic infrastructure, consular services, public diplomacy, e-diplomacy, trade, and foreign aid. Lowy subsequently published *A Digital DFAT* (a so-called 'Policy Brief') in 2010 which specifically confronted the department's lack of technological sophistication (Hanson, 2010). *Diplomatic Disrepair* (2011) then focussed on Australia's overseas diplomatic network. In 2013, Lowy published *Consular Conundrum,* which specifically tackled the overextension of Australia's consular services (A. Oliver, 2013a).

Lowy's approach was policy-cycle driven. It initially sought to define the issue and set an agenda – in the process generating political attention. Once it had captured political attention, Lowy went further, becoming policy specific and attempting to influence policy development and formulation – and at the same time generate a political and policy priority. Lowy was relevant, active, and seeking to influence across the entire policy cycle.

Issue Framing

The evolution of Lowy's scholarship was distinct in a second way. As it narrowed its focus, Lowy's language became more forceful, more pointed. Lowy initially targeted the internal frame by attempting to directly persuade the policy community on the issue's 'definition, causes and solutions' (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, pp. 1371-1372). Lowy was also active in the media at this early stage, but these engagements targeted an informed rather than a general public.

Lowy attempted to capture policy community attention by situating Australia as an important member of the international community. The Institute then advanced a relative-deficiency frame by systematically demonstrating that Australia was failing to promote its interests in ways similar to peer-group nations (the G20 and OECD). Lowy extended this frame by comparing DFAT's resource inadequacies to the spoils enjoyed by the Defence Department. A supportive evidence base legitimised this two-pronged relative-deficiency frame.

This framing insisted that Australia's relative position was inconsistent with its international standing as a credible middle power. Australia 'has been deeply engaged with the world since European settlement', and its lack of investment in the instruments of international policy left Australia 'ill-equipped to secure fundamental objectives internationally' (Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, pp. ix, 2). That is, there was a conspicuous disjuncture between how Australia perceived itself and how Australia equipped and conducted itself. Lowy's internal frame fundamentally proposed that Australia was in a competition to advance its interests, and a failure to properly position Australia in this competition was negligent.

Lowy initially prosecuted this internal frame in forceful yet judicious language. The style of the 2009 *Diplomatic Deficit* report largely reflected the sensibilities of the individual 'Blue-Ribbon Panel' members. Allan Gyngell confirms that this report was 'written with them in mind' but, at the same time, was not 'toned down' (interview, 2020). Nonetheless, what was initially described as 'hollowed out and under increasing strain' later became 'simply outdated and inadequate'; then, 'it's either act now or stop pretending Australia is a creative middle power, and relegate ourselves to the global sidelines'; and finally, 'what has happened to DFAT over the last 25 years is a bipartisan botch of near-biblical proportions' (see Blue Ribbon Panel, 2009, p. 47; A. Oliver and Shearer, 2011, p. x; A. Oliver, 2013b).

Lowy's evolved forcefulness directly relates to its revised issue framing. The external frame became more prominent as Lowy focused on the specific elements of its broader thesis.[268] That is, Lowy sought to elevate the issue's political relevance by appealing to the broader voting public. But Lowy's technocratic internal frame was unlikely to resonate with the public. Instead, Lowy targeted this broader audience through a service-impairment frame. Lowy asserted that Australian consulates were insufficiently resourced to accommodate the increasing demands of the 'huge numbers of Australians travelling overseas every year' (A. Oliver, 2013a). As a result, politicians faced political consequences due to the tangible impacts of this underinvestment. To be sure, Lowy's initial works did include commentary on the potential service-impairment issues. But this frame became more prominent over time, supplanting the relative-deficiency frame.

[268] External frames resonate with external audiences and indirectly prompt policymaker action (Shiffman and Smith, 2007, pp. 1371-1372).

The relative-deficiency and service-impairment frames helped Lowy to attract attention and establish a *political* priority. The Chair of the JSC Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Representation, Nick Champion, succinctly captures the essence of Lowy's influence, stating that Lowy 'built the scene for what would be government action' (interview, 2021). But government action has been underwhelming – Lowy could only do so much. *Policy* priorities must inevitably be relevant to an incumbent politician's short-term political prospects. The issue's characteristics ultimately outweighed the potency of Lowy's ideas – substantial policy action to redress DFAT's capability diminution has been consistently side-lined.

11.5 Conclusion

On the one hand, the Lowy Institute has been manifestly influential on this issue. It has had a discernible effect upon 'those who control from a position of authority' by defining the issue, getting it on the political agenda, and contributing to policy formulation (Domhoff, 1967, p. 11). On the other hand, Lowy has been ineffective in achieving its ultimate objective – reversing the long-term decline in DFAT budgetary resources. In short, Lowy made the issue a *political* priority but not a *policy* priority.

There is little doubt that Lowy is a powerful actor. And it has remained the only significant civil society actor consistently prosecuting this case. But the nature of the issue itself undercut the impetus for change. The story of Lowy's relative success, and the impediments it faced, are best told by those close to the issue:

> I don't think that you can make a strong case that the government has reversed the decline in DFAT's resourcing. […] I think it's more a case that governments don't think there is a cost to them in cutting DFAT's budget (interview with Varghese, 2021).

> I think where [Lowy] succeeded is getting it on the agenda […] I don't think you'd say they'd been successful in changing policy. But I think it would be pretty heroic to expect a think tank to be able to do that alone. […] There just hasn't been – for whatever reason – the sort of political and other will to address it, or it hasn't been given sufficient priority (interview with Sharma, 2020).

> The issue comes down to policy priorities. […] And, you know, in the public's estimation, it's important, but it's a lower priority (interview with A. Oliver, 2020).

> Raising awareness, I think high marks. […] It did change the nature of the debate […], but in terms of actually fixing anything up, you'd have to say that we weren't all that successful (interview with Gyngell, 2020).

Coupling these comments with the earlier analysis suggests several key takeaways. They also illustrate the complexity and, at times, the futility of think-tanking.

First, the case demonstrates the utility of the Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework. The framework's four dimensions highlight Lowy's prominence and power (within the policymaking community) and underline the importance of sophisticated ideas. But the issue's intractable characteristics and the countervailing political context were ultimately the most important dimensions of the case. As Beeson and Stone (2013, p. 12) contend, 'dynamics in the political stream make policy entrepreneurship successful (or not)'.

Second, the case demonstrates that an unwavering think tank campaign that is well-researched and well-targeted can influence policymaking (if not entirely successfully) – even on an issue with intractable characteristics. Kingdon (2011, p. 181) asserts that effective policy entrepreneurship requires persistence, 'tenacity', and a 'willingness to invest large and sometimes remarkable quantities of one's resources'. Lowy's campaign evidenced these qualities, but it was still thwarted by salience barriers. In another way, the 'national mood' neither encouraged nor facilitated policy action, despite Lowy's best efforts (Kingdon 2011; Herweg et al., 2017, p. 24).

Third, think tanks can be influential civil society actors by championing issues that policymakers are either unwilling or unable to champion themselves. That is, policymakers can 'use' think tanks in service of certain policy objectives. In the present case, the Committee members in each of the JSC inquiries used Lowy as an independent interlocutor (a highly credible and respected one) to legitimate their claims. Lowy acted as a bulwark against any debate (or dissent) on the definition and cause of the issue.

Fourth, Lowy pursued this issue from a whole-of-institute perspective – it did not rely on a particular scholar to plead its case. It drew on the institutes entire intellectual and financial wherewithal to forcefully push for reform. Lowy had established itself as a respected and credible actor in the policy community and leveraged that standing by applying all of its intellectual resources.

Finally, from a philosophical standpoint, the case demonstrates the consequences of the Howard government's earlier contention that 'policy advice needed to be contestable' (see Gyngell, 2016, p. 275). The present thesis argues that Howard's efforts to break the government monopoly on policy-idea generation led to a burgeoning of think tanks (see

Chapter Five). It is ironic, then, that one of Australia's most prominent think tanks is now arguing for government investment in the policymaking capacity of the public service.

Chapter Twelve: Discussion and Conclusions

12.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the activities of Australian think tanks, the role they play in the policy process, and the manifestation of their influence. Part Two first addresses the study's supplementary research questions: *What is the structure of the Australian think tank industry? What are the characteristics of the participants? Who do think tanks attempt to influence? How do think tanks attempt to influence?* These supplementary questions support Part Three's examination of the study's central research question: *What influence do think tanks exert on policymaking in Australia?*

This concluding chapter examines the principal findings that emerge from the preceding empirical chapters (encompassing Parts Two and Three). The chapter is consistent with the dictates of the mixed methods research philosophy (as detailed in Chapter Three) and integrates the data and findings from the study's surveys, interviews, and case studies (along with data from observational fieldwork and content analysis). The chapter represents a 'point of interface' by assessing the prior chapters' inferences and unpacking several key themes that emerge from the study overall (Morse and Niehaus, 2009, p. 155; Guest, 2013; Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017).

Several key findings emerge from the analysis that together demonstrates the uniqueness of Australia's policy institutes. Some authors attempt to homogenise the industry by proposing theories that purportedly capture think tank's characteristics, approaches, behaviours, positioning, and impacts. But the present study shows that these generalisations (while supported by utilitarian frameworks) are mostly untenable. Put simply, think tanks' diversity and divergences defy uniform characterisation. Indeed, an appropriate response to this study's central research question is two counter questions: Which think tanks? Which policymakers?

Four key themes help to explain the futility of generalisations. First, think tank approaches (to influence exertion) and think tank impacts (on target audiences) identifiably diverge across philosophical orientations. It is insufficient to solely consider policy institutes' ideological preferences when assessing their approaches and impacts – their audiences' philosophical persuasion is also an important variable. Right-leaning think tanks stand out in

this regard and anchor the discussion in Section 12.2. Second, this study shows that think tanks' policy capacities substantially vary. Material resources are crucial determinants of policy capacity but do not, in and of themselves, determine policy capacity. Third, think tanks' position in the social structure and their supposed network associations do not consistently conform to a particular framework. Their third-party connections discernibly vary within and across individual policy issues, thereby straining the applicability of structured network perspectives. Fourth, think tank influence manifests in different ways. Policy institutes target different stages of the policy cycle and seek to impact policy in distinct ways – and they sometimes influence policy in unintended ways.

The ensuing sections elucidate these principal findings.

12.2 Divergent Styles, Methods and Perceptions

The preceding chapters demonstrate that institute characteristics and entity objectives are important determinants of method selection. This study also finds that ideology is a consequential variable that impacts think tanks' issue foci and activities.

Federal parliamentarians seemingly divide along ideological lines in their responsiveness to think tank contributions. This inference is rarely countenanced in the existing think tank literature, which instead regards policymakers as homogenously responsive (although J. Smith, 1991, intimates such a disjunction). But the present research finds that right-leaning parliamentarians are less amenable to think tank policy contributions than those on the left. Fielding et al. (2012) explain that conservative audiences are more inclined to reject ideas that challenge existing beliefs. Within this context, some think tanks face formidable barriers to influence because they primarily mobilise in favour of change rather than seeking to maintain a status quo. To be sure, there are right-leaning parliamentarians who welcome think tank policy submissions. These officials gravitate to the centre of the political spectrum. But attitudes harden as officials creep further to the right.[269] On the other hand, this study shows that left-leaning parliamentarians uniformly welcome think tank policy proposals and see them as important contributors to policy development.

These results are unlikely to disturb think tanks that primarily target the government bureaucracy (rather than politicians). Nevertheless, the findings have implications for many

[269] Interview data facilitates this observation.

think tanks, particularly those focusing on emotive, vigorously contested social issues where values and beliefs play a pivotal role. In these cases, institutes are likely to be more effective if they consider audience responsiveness when styling their outputs, especially when those style decisions reflect those audiences' values- or evidence-based preferences.

Most think tanks in this study claim that they privilege evidence-based research, but the major right-leaning institutes openly profess a values-driven approach. Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993, pp. 15-20, 126-138) and Head (2015, p. 283) submit that a wholly evidence-based policy world is unrealistically utopian and that values play an important and self-evident role in policy circles (see also Head and Banerjee, 2020, p. 118). The evidence in the present thesis supports these claims. Right-leaning parliamentarians identify values as a fundamental component of the policymaking process. Therefore, right-leaning think tanks produce content that aligns in style with (one of) their audiences' preferences.

But how does this contention reconcile with the finding that right-leaning federal parliamentarians are more likely than those on the left to shun think tank contributions? It suggests that right-leaning parliamentarians are less inclined to use right-leaning think tanks' research for *policy development* purposes. Adapting Schontal and Nordgren (2021), right-leaning parliamentarians see think tanks as a means to reduce 'frictions' (thereby conditioning the public's responsiveness to parliamentarians' proposals) rather than suppliers of 'fuel' (that is, the provision of ideas that drive policy). Interview evidence supports these inferences. A preponderance of right-leaning parliamentarians assert that think tanks are rarely cited in internal policy discussions and dismiss the idea that think tanks constructively contribute to policy development. This does not mean that right-leaning parliamentarians believe that think tank content is irrelevant or lacks utility. On the contrary, think tanks are *used* by all sides of politics, but in discernibly different ways. Right-leaning parliamentarians are inclined to use think tanks as legitimators of their policy proposals (in the public sphere) and as tools that prepare the ground for future values-based policy proposals. In contrast, interview evidence shows that left-leaning parliamentarians tend to use think tanks to support policy development (this might be due to their limited resources while in opposition).

The CIS case study (Chapter Nine) provides support for these inferences.[270] The CIS's Jeremy Sammut embraced a values-based approach in his advocacy of child protection and

[270] Recall that the CIS case focuses on state rather than federal politics. The inferences here therefore assume that right-leaning state and federal representatives are similarly inclined.

adoption reform. While he supported his arguments with a solid evidence base, his proposals were undeniably values-driven. Sammut built a body of evidence to *support* his individual preferences regarding child security, fairness and opportunity. Similarly, his framing in the public sphere reflected this values-driven approach. The right-leaning NSW Liberal Party responded to these values-driven submissions, but as Sammut himself attests, the Minister's office and the Department of Family and Community Services led policy development.

In this case, it is more straightforward to assert that the CIS simply set an agenda. After all, that is what it did. But an agenda can be set through evidence-based or values-based submissions. If Sammut eschewed a values-based approach and instead presented a dispassionate evidence-based account, he is unlikely to have been as prominent or effective in his appeals to the right-leaning NSW government. Sammut discerned that child adoption was an emotive political issue rather than an issue that would be solved through weight of evidence. Critically, his style of knowledge production correlated with the nature of the issue (see Head, 2015, on types of knowledge production and differing research methodologies).

Notwithstanding these findings, the difference in scholarship styles between the major right-leaning institutes (values-based) and centrist and left-leaning institutes (mainly evidence-based) requires further investigation. If researchers can empirically authenticate these apparent (self-declared) differences in style, assessments can then be made as to the kinds of influence that these respective styles might foster, along with the attendant responsiveness of left- and right-leaning parliamentarians to these different research styles.

The Grattan Institute case (Chapter Ten) nevertheless demonstrates the need for inferential caution. Grattan used evidence-based research to prosecute the school funding debate and contributed to the issue's evolution. However, the (Coalition) Minister's office maintains that although Grattan's role was important, it did not singularly impact policy development. Grattan's evidence-based contributions legitimated the government proposals in the public sphere. Thus, in this case, a wholly evidenced-based approach *was* valuable – in a manner consistent with the above contentions – to right-leaning parliamentarians.

Ideology is important in another way. The evidence shows that think tanks with different philosophical persuasions use divergent digital methods to package their messages. Left-leaning institutes evidentially prefer social media platforms (and dominate that medium), while right-leaning institutes instead favour long-form digital formats (such as podcasts and videos). Centrist institutes tend to privilege website accessibility and sophistication.

The long-form video and podcast content generated by the major right-leaning think tanks is substantially philosophical in nature. These right-leaning institutes primarily use these digital methods as a conduit to advance political ideas rather than to promote specific policy proposals, entirely consistent with their values-based orientations. This assertion supports the idea that conservative institutes are inclined to produce ideology-confirming ideas rather than evidence-based proposals that might champion policy change (see Fielding et al., 2012). In other words, right-leaning think tanks use long-form formats to 'keep the faithful, faithful' (interview with Gittins, 2020). To be clear, right-leaning institutes also champion ideas that challenge the status quo and promote policy change. But these proposals are values-based and are not typically the content featured in long-form digital methods.

It is more difficult to discern patterns in the content or purpose of think tanks' social media usage despite left-leaning institutes' clear ascendancy across these platforms. Mostly, this medium is used to deliver research reports and highlight policy issues. Suffice to say that method preferences more broadly encapsulate institute conceptions of audience demographics and availability. Institutes gravitate to the medium that best enables them to reach the audience most receptive to their messages.

In sum, think tank ideology correlates highly with research style, digital method selection, policymaker engagement, and influence perceptions. These findings demonstrate the challenges in answering this study's central research question and why the think tank industry more broadly defies generalisation.

12.3 Policy Capacity

Darren Halpin (2014, p. 180) posits that policy capacities reflect the 'abilities and skills' entities develop to affect the policy process. With similar thinking, Wu et al. (2018, pp. 3-14) develop a versatile framework that distinguishes policy capacities across three 'skills or competencies' (analytical, operational, and political) at three different levels (individual, organisational, and systemic). This framework helps to surface the capacities think tanks develop to influence policymaking.

Policy institutes' financial circumstances crucially determine how they develop policy capacity. Institutes apply their fiscal resources in varied ways to develop these influence capabilities. For example, CEDA directs substantial sums toward its extensive conference and events program, ASPI runs professional development courses for strategic and national

security professionals, the IPA invests in state-of-the-art audio-visual infrastructure, and Beyond Zero Emissions completes highly technocratic research to appeal to an expert audience. Each of these institutes directs its resources toward the mechanism that most effectively advances its influence ambitions.

It is the case that large institutes – as defined by their resource base – have the opportunity to develop more extensive and varied capacities. Their superior 'operational capacities at the organisational level' facilitate the application of their intellectual resources (Wu et al., 2018, p. 10). But just as material resources should not be conflated with policy capacity, they likewise should not be conflated with financial circumstances.

This study shows that isolated metrics such as revenue and expenses (typically used to define 'resources') do not sufficiently capture the nature of an entity's financial circumstances. The structure of an institutes balance sheet, its capital position, and its contractual arrangements are all fundamental inputs to the appraisal of financial circumstances, alongside the basic income statement measures. An institute might be large according to its revenue production but have a weak capital base, leaving it materially exposed to unwelcome events. Thus, the appraisal of policy capacity (effectively an intervening variable, where policy influence is the dependent variable) should reference the broader concept of financial circumstances as an independent variable instead of (simply defined) material resources.

This inquiry's three case studies demonstrate how 'prominent' think tanks – with enviable financial circumstances – invest in policy capacity. The common thread across the three cases is the sophistication of the scholars advancing their institute's perspectives (that is, their individual analytical competencies). While the institutes encountered mixed success in preference attainment, the individual scholars (at a minimum) attracted attention to their proposals and were high profile players in the ensuing debates. The scholars' proposals were penetrating and analytical and reflect their undeniable intellectual capabilities: Jeremy Sammut from the Centre for Independent Studies (Chapter Nine) has a PhD from Monash University; Peter Goss from the Grattan Institute (Chapter Ten) has a PhD from Harvard University; Alex Oliver from the Lowy Institute (Chapter Eleven) holds a University Medal from the University of New South Wales, and Andrew Shearer from the Lowy Institute holds a Master's Degree from the University of Cambridge.

Wu et al. (2018) assert that policy contributors' analytical capacities substantially determine their influence. But it is simply not enough to be a proficient analyst of policy issues. The effectiveness of individual policy contributors crucially depends upon their ability to assess the political climate and respond to the incumbent political circumstances. That is, *political* capacity is a crucial element of *policy* capacity (Wu et al., 2018, p. 8). This distinction sets think tanks apart from their cousins in academia. Think tank scholars persistently immerse themselves in political processes and circumstances, and contemplate these conditions when crafting their policy submissions.

The existing think tank literature underappreciates the importance of individual think tank scholars. Indeed, it is exceedingly rare to find any reference to the individuals that make think tanks, think tanks (Lindquist, 1989, being a noteworthy exception). The capacity and credibility of the organisations that house these scholars are undoubtedly critical as they provide individual scholars with status and profile. They also support scholars' ideational processes through their operational capabilities. Thus, there remains a strong interdependence between these two different levels of policy capacity (Bettini and Head, 2018, pp. 306-307). But individual scholars, rather than their associated institutes, dominate the discussions in this inquiry's three case studies. Policymakers commonly distinguished Jeremy Sammut in the CIS case study and Peter Goss in the Grattan Institute case study, instead of their resident institutes (the Lowy case did not initially conform to this conceptualisation due to the panel authorship of the *Diplomatic Deficit* report).

These findings were unanticipated as this study's methodology privileges the organisation as the analytical focus. All three case studies set out to examine think tank influence at the organisational level, and the cases were framed as such. But the cases demonstrate that the individual scholar is at least as salient as the organisation itself. This assertion will come as no surprise to the three prominent think tanks in question. These think tanks choose to augment their policy capacity by investing in skilled scholars who, in turn, enhance the credibility of their institute through their enlightened policy contributions. As Halpin's (2014) framework suggests, the CIS, Lowy and Grattan are not influential because they have deep pockets – they are influential because they prudently use their fiscal resources to enhance their ability to influence policymaking.

Although the three cases commonly leverage the capabilities of their skilled scholars, there are variations in their approaches. The CIS's Jeremy Sammut acted alone in his pursuit

of child protection and adoption reforms. In contrast, the Lowy Institute took a 'whole-of-entity' approach to the diplomatic-deficit issue, with numerous scholars making important research contributions (although Alex Oliver can be distinguished for her sustained attention). The CIS and Lowy could sustain these divergent approaches over an extended period because of their otherwise generous investments in their research capacities. That is, both think tanks have a pool of well-trained scholars who could retain focus on other core issues. The Grattan Institute was similarly able to pivot to the school funding issue (an issue it had previously avoided) while continuing its research on other education-related issues.

Few other institutes can quickly pivot or dedicate resources in the same way as these three. Smaller institutes are less able to commit to permanent (and expensive) research capacities and must instead apply resources to capacities that require variable, rather than fixed, commitments. For example, think tanks such as Per Capita and the Centre for Policy Development privilege community engagement to more directly impact their target audiences. These innovative approaches evidence investment in systemic policy capacities. These are necessary because institutes with constrained financial circumstances do not enjoy the breadth of individual capacities housed in larger institutes.

But of all the capacities that think tanks develop to influence policymaking, it is individual scholars' research and analysis that define this group of entities. Policy ideation is central to think tanks' ongoing relevance and credibility. Elites in the media and politics indicate that their demand for think tank scholarship substantially depends on the originality, utility and consistency of think tank ideas. As such, think tank resources must necessarily be applied to policy capacities that augment these ideational capabilities.

12.4 Network and Policy Process Perspectives

Section 12.3 discussed the importance of think tank scholars' policy capacities. The present section considers *systemic* policy capacity, the third level of Wu et al.'s (2018) policy capacity framework. The section proffers that think tanks' activities within loosely affiliated policy networks – coupled with their political and operational competencies – elevate systemic policy capacities and ultimately enhance the likelihood of policy influence and change.

To step back briefly, Chapter Two introduced the three theories that have dominated theorising on think tanks' roles and influence: elite theories, pluralist perspectives, and network approaches. This thesis does not 'test' these theories (or any others discussed in the

preceding chapters) but does offer some observations regarding their applicability. First, elite theories do not appear to suitably characterise the Australian think tank *industry*. Under its varied conceptualisations (see, for example, Mills, 1959; Domhoff, 1967; Dye, 1978; Peschek, 1987), one might expect think tanks to be more broadly recognised as a core component of the policymaking process. But this is only true in a minority of cases: only a subset of entities is readily identified by policymaker and media elites. Further, many think tanks target their ideas to a public audience in the hope that the public will exert their democratic entitlement to influence the evolution of policy (notwithstanding the findings of Gilens and Page, 2014). This thesis also uncovers little evidence to suggest that wealthy benefactors are directing think tanks' research programs and policy outputs. And think tanks organisational profiles do not suggest congruency with a common interpretation of 'elite' entities: 97 per cent are NFPs, and most have very modest fiscal resources. A reasonable proportion of think tank employees have historical government or political associations, but there are few cases that might evidence claims that think tanks are part of an Australian power elite (see Appendix S for detailed evidence on think tank staff members' historical employment relationships).

This inquiry's case studies offer support for the pluralist perspective. Consistent with pluralist theory, competition amongst an assortment of groups seeking to influence the path of policy is a defining feature of two of the three cases (excluding the Lowy case). Abelson (2009, pp. 52-54) insists that pluralism inadequately explains why some groups influence public policy, but Halpin (2014) and Wu et al. (2018) substantially address this issue by setting out how groups develop policy capacities and why these capacities might then allow groups to influence policy. The question then becomes, how do these individual interest groups participate, interact, or engage as part of broader policy networks? John (2012, pp. 78-79) suggests that the network approach has displaced elite theories and pluralist perspectives. As such, the majority of this section proffers observations on the ability of network theories to explain the space think tanks occupy in the broad policy arena and their approach to policy influence.[271]

This thesis' three case studies provide differing degrees of support for the varied network perspectives. Chapter Nine contends that the CIS was part of a loosely affiliated policy network where its collective advocacy (with other key protagonists) encouraged change in

[271] This section again uses the term 'policy network' to generically describe a broad range of network perspectives (see D. Marsh and Rhodes, 1992)

NSW child protection and adoption laws. Chapter Ten submits that entities championing school funding reforms – including the Grattan Institute – closely resembled the issue networks imagined by Hugh Heclo (1978), but might also approximate more recent interpretations of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's Advocacy Coalition Framework. Chapter Eleven shows that the Lowy Institute was largely an isolated advocate (in the non-government sphere) for expanding Australia's instruments of international policy, but formed a narrow epistemic community with experts from parliamentary committees.

In assessing the accordance of the case studies' observed circumstances with the identified network theories, an interesting – and confounding – observation stands out: the think tanks in the three cases had either limited *intention* of adopting a coordinated network approach or were unsuccessful in building more structured and cohesive networks, if they so intended. This is a relevant point when determining which network theories most closely align with each individual case. There is no doubt that the three think tanks (in the separate cases) shared information and interacted with third-party entities. The Grattan Institute's Peter Goss and Julie Sonnemann met with people on both sides of the debate to present Grattan's proposals. The CIS's Jeremy Sammut engaged like-minded organisations to share his perspectives. And the Lowy Institute established a Blue Ribbon Panel to legitimate its submissions. But there were only limited systematic or concerted efforts to build cohesive coalitions of advocates in these cases.

All three institutes interacted with politicians and government departments to advance their ideas, but these policymakers represent the end-user targets-of-influence. Rhodes (2010) proffers that policy networks represent links between governments and third-party actors where the government has a dependence on the resources of those actors. This question of dependency might constrain interpretations of network constitution. The point here revolves around the question of intentions and evidence of interdependencies. Some network conceptions expressly presuppose members' participatory intentions, potentially imperilling the applicability of such models in this thesis' case studies. For example, D. Marsh and Rhodes (1992, pp. 13-14) determine that policy communities have close and stable relationships, are characterised by 'frequent and high-quality interactions between all members', and are hierarchical in structure (see also Rhodes, 2010, p. 427). It could not be claimed that this thesis' three case studies exhibit these types of purposive, structured relationships. Nevertheless, network conceptualisations are many and varied. Some require

cohesive coalitions with regular and systematic interactions while others are conceived of more loosely and are framed as information networks.

Chapter Nine suggests that the CIS was a constituent of a policy network, but the chapter did not detail a particular network variant. The characteristics of the case's primary actors and their inherent expertise immediately rule out labelling the observed network an epistemic community. But Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's (1993) Advocacy Coalition Framework might be a suitable descriptor. There are grounds to make this case: the NSW Department of Education, the Minister's office, several high-profile NGOs (Barnardos and Adopt Change, in particular), some noteworthy journalists, and the CIS, all mobilised in favour of reform on this political issue.

Although these protagonists had common policy objectives, Chapter Nine shows that they did not possess shared beliefs regarding the basic causes of the identified issues (their varied interpretations of the purported causes were discussed in interviews with Anonymous Interviewee D, 2020; Sammut, 2020b; Tregeagle, 2020). In this regard, it would be inaccurate to suggest there was an alignment in the 'deep core beliefs' of these 'members' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999, pp. 132-133; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017, pp. 140-141). It might be that the case's prominent actors shared *policy* core beliefs – beliefs that are 'bound by scope and topic to the policy subsystem' – but it is clear that their fundamental normative values demonstrably diverged (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017, p. 140; Lindquist, 2021, p. 104). In addition, Jeremy Sammut (CIS), Susan Tregeagle (Barnardos), and Renee Carter (Adopt Change) reject the idea that their organisations engaged in a 'non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993, p. 25; interviews with Carter, 2020; Sammut, 2020b; Tregeagle, 2020). Jenkins-Smith et al. (2017, p. 150) do however suggest that the members of an advocacy coalition might 'sometimes rarely interact with each other.' But in the present case, the degree of the interaction is not in question – it is the nature and structure of those interactions that are most pertinent. Thus, it is difficult to position the CIS case as an exemplar of the Advocacy Coalition Framework.

Lindquist 2021 (p. 105) suggests that 'advocacy coalitions were never originally imagined as coalitions in the strict sense', but this appears to be a liberal interpretation of the model. Fischer (2003, pp. 105-106) points to the limitations of the ACF based on the requirement for actors to 'coordinate their political activities in specific, identifiable ways', and that these coalitions are necessarily held together by well-defined shared belief systems.

Fischer instead advances Hajer's (2013) discourse coalition model to explain policy change – a concept that better aligns with the CIS case study.[272] Here, actors with potentially different values and beliefs adopt a common discourse to promote policy change, and are not required to coordinate their political activities in the process (Fischer, 2003; Hajer, 2013; Pautz, 2018; Westermeier, 2018). In the CIS case, the primary actors constructed narrative storylines that interpreted events in a broader social context – interpretations that emerged from divergent beliefs and values – and then coalesced around specific and aligned discursive claims and assertions (Hajer, 2013, p. 47; Fischer, 2003, p. 102). The discourse coalition model seems to better characterise the observed circumstances in Chapter Nine.

The Grattan Institute case study more readily aligns with the specifications of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (see Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017, pp. 135-159). In this case, Grattan extensively engaged with a myriad of actors in a mature policy subsystem to advance its perspectives (and to learn from others). There was a degree of coordinated activity between Grattan and the other principal actors based on their policy core beliefs, while these principal actors (in this policy subsystem) had been stable over time (unlike in the CIS case). Policy-oriented learning is a feature of the Grattan case. Prior policy applications enabled the key protagonists to build on existing policy foundations and propose augmentations – informed by the outcomes of the original Gonski reforms – eventually leading to policy change (see Lindquist, 2021). The significant policy changes evident in the *AEA Act (2017)* were primarily driven by 'internal events', which shaped Grattan's beliefs regarding the necessary policy prescriptions (see Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017, p. 146). The preponderance of evidence supports the ACF as an appropriate explanation for policy change in this case study.

Peter Haas' (1992) epistemic community framework can be applied to the Lowy Institute case. The parliamentary inquiry into Australia's overseas representation brought together 'a network of professionals' with 'policy-relevant knowledge' and a 'shared set of beliefs' regarding the causes and implications of Australia's degraded diplomatic corps (Haas, 1992, pp. 2-3). More specifically, the Lowy Institute's scholars, the Lowy Institute Blue Ribbon Panel, the Parliamentary Committees, and a selection of other foreign policy experts (whose contributions were arguably peripheral), 1) shared a set of normative beliefs that diplomacy

[272] Hajer (2013, p. 47) defines a discourse coalition as the 'ensemble of a set of story lines, the actors that utter those story lines, and the practices that conform to those story lines, all organized around a discourse.'

can advance Australia's interests; 2) shared a set of causal beliefs that the diminution of DFAT funding had neutered DFAT's effectiveness; 3) shared notions of validity that centred on measures of Australia's comparative international footprint; and 4) shared a common policy enterprise that favoured diplomatic solutions to foreign policy issues (Haas, 1992, p. 3; Westermeier, 2018, p. 177). The small number of consequential participants in the case were 'knowledge elites who possess scientific expertise' (Ladi, 2005, p. 282). And Allan Gyngell professed a desire to mobilise other professionals (experts) in a bid to advance Lowy's arguments. Ultimately, Gyngell's efforts in this regard amounted to little. Regardless, the case substantially conforms to the epistemic community framework.

It is difficult to align a particular network model to the circumstances across the three case studies, although Marsh and Rhodes (1992) suggest that Heclo's issue network conceptualisation is structurally less demanding than other policy network approaches. The issue network perspective likely has the broadest utility in the present study because it best captures the relational circumstances exhibited across the cases. Heclo's (1978, pp. 102-103) issue networks exhibit fluctuating membership, idea contestation, diverse perspectives, and 'variable degrees of mutual commitment'. This loose conceptualisation permits the framework's application to many policy cases and reasonably depicts the circumstances in the Grattan Institute school funding reform case and the CIS child adoption case (although maybe less so in the Lowy diplomatic deficit case).

Interestingly, data from the forty-four think tank interviews in Part Two show that relatively few institutes imagine themselves prosecuting policy issues as part of policy networks. Further, few institutes indicate any intention (or attempt) to act in anything other than a solo capacity to advance their policy preferences ('think-and-do-tanks' stand out as exceptions). To many think tanks in Australia, the plain language interpretation of a 'policy network' references structured relationships and purposive engagements with third-party organisations to advance shared policy prescriptions. To many, building or participating in these types of networks is evidentially not a central ambition.

Of course, there are exceptions to this determination. Think tanks like AHURI, CEDA, and government-affiliated institutes have more structured third-party engagements and relationships.[273] These institutes comfortably sit within the advocacy coalition and epistemic

[273] AHURI's Michael Fotheringham also notes 'the informal policy networks [are] crucial to the policy process' (Fotheringham, 2019).

community frameworks on many issues. And, to be clear, most think tanks do engage with third parties to exchange ideas, develop concepts, and share information (in addition to their public engagement efforts). But these engagements are, in many cases, ad-hoc, unstructured, and inconsistent, rather than institutionalised, systematic interactions.

The cases presented in this thesis show that the application of individual network theories is substantially case-dependent.[274] Having said that, the cases consistently evidence the features of the policy process theories outlined in Chapter Two: Baumgartner and Jones' (2009) Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and Kingdon's (2011) Multiple Streams Framework.[275]

There had been lengthy periods of policy equilibrium in the CIS case (on adoption), the Grattan case (on school funding), and the Lowy case (on the diplomatic deficit), prior to these respective institutes seeking to impose themselves. But in the CIS and Grattan cases an identifiable event forced the corresponding issue onto the macropolitical agenda, opening the window to the possibility of significant policy change (consistent with PET). Tellingly, there was no such event in the Lowy case, and meaningful policy change remained elusive.

There are other consistencies with Punctuated Equilibrium Theory. The policy subsystems in both the CIS case and the Lowy case (but less so in the Grattan case) could be characterised as policy monopolies, where a dominant image of the policy issue promoted uniform understandings of the most suitable policy solutions (see Baumgartner et al, 2017, p. 60, 62). This policy monopoly collapsed in the CIS case when a 'massive intervention by previously uninvolved political actor' reshaped the debate through policy images that changed the 'manner in which a policy is characterised or understood' (Baumgartner et al, 2017, p. 60, 62, 69). There was no such macropolitical upheaval in the Lowy case. And although there was less of a policy monopoly in the Grattan case, the institute aggressively advanced policy images that helped to push the issue onto the macropolitical agenda, making major policy change possible.

The Multiple Streams Framework has applicability across all three cases. There is evidence of Kingdon's three independent streams coupling in both the CIS case and the Grattan Institute case, but less so in the Lowy case. To be sure, Lowy played a critical role in

[274] The caveat here, of course, is that the cases in this thesis were prosecuted primarily from the perspective of one particular actor.

[275] Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's Advocacy Coalition Framework is likewise a policy process theory, but it is addressed in this section as part of the network theory discussion.

almost single-handedly thrusting the diplomatic deficit issue onto the political agenda. But whereas the core elements in the political stream – in particular – were conducive to agenda change (and later, policy change) in the CIS and Grattan cases, these elements were not as evident in the Lowy case. That is, the national mood was largely unaffected by Lowy's campaign and, along with the lack of a focusing event in the problem stream, there was no call to action or sense of urgency for politicians to diverge from their incumbent policy preferences (see Herweg et al, 2017, pp. 19-26). In contrast, there was evidence of problematic policy preferences (particularly amongst crossbenchers) and time constraints necessitating government action in the Grattan case, and to an extent in the CIS case. All three think tanks were active in the policy stream (where they acted as policy entrepreneurs) but, once again, only Grattan and the CIS were able to couple their proposals with the other two streams (see Herweg et al., 2017, p. 28).

Interestingly, the MSF emphasises that policy problems (in the problem stream) are not 'objective facts' (see Herweg et al., 2017, p. 22). Rather, they are social constructs that require effective framing to attract policymaker attention. This assertion supports the earlier contention that the CIS case conforms to the tenets of the discourse coalition model. The CIS was effectively a 'problem broker' that sought to appeal its case for child protection and adoption reform via discursive frames that included elements of 'knowledge, values, and emotion' (Knaggard, 2015, pp. 455-457). The emotion element was notably lacking in the Lowy case.

In sum, this section has identified some consistencies with several theories that capture the activities and explain the role of think tanks in the policy process. This thesis does not claim to have applied these theories to each case in a comprehensive, systematic manner, but the preceding analysis does reveal consistencies that might encourage further research.

12.5 Influence Manifestations

This thesis uses a modified Shiffman and Smith (2007) framework to analyse think tanks' roles and influences on policymaking. The framework proposes that think tanks might exert influence by attracting political attention, establishing a political priority, or provoking (developing) a policy priority. This conceptualisation facilitates comparisons of think tank influence across this inquiry's three individual case studies. Supporting this framework, Chapter Three proposed an 'evolved-status taxonomy' to simply depict a think tank's

influence on a particular policy issue. Reflecting on the Part Three case studies, Table 12.1 populates the taxonomy according to the evidenced outcomes. To be clear, the table proposes that the CIS, for example, helped child protection and adoption reforms become a political priority, while the issue itself evolved to become a policy priority.[276]

Table 12-1: Evolved status taxonomy - case study classifications

		Evolved status of policy issue		
		Political attention	Political priority	Policy priority
Think tank influence	Political attention			Grattan (?)
	Political priority		Lowy	CIS
	Policy priority			

All three cases demonstrate that think tanks can (and do) play influential roles in Australia's policy process. But think tank prominence is likely an important determinant of success. The Centre for Independent Studies, Grattan Institute, and Lowy Institute face fewer impediments to the effective prosecution of policy issues than most think tanks. Their enviable financial circumstances, substantial policy capacities, and distinguished industry profiles mean that their effectiveness depends largely on the strength of their policy ideation.

This assertion does not attempt to diminish the equivalent importance of political context, issue characteristics, or third-party actor engagement (foundational dimensions of the Shiffman and Smith framework). But these three dimensions represent exogenous factors that apply equally to all entities pursuing individual policy issues. As Baumgartner et al. (2009, p. 110) emphasise, policy advocates 'are often swimming upstream, trying to make the best out of a situation they do not control.' Nevertheless, the three think tanks examined in these cases can more easily deal with these frictions due to their organisational circumstances. So, although these policy cases examine representative issues, the prominence of these three institutes requires consideration when assessing the pervasiveness of think tank influence.

The case studies show how these three prominent think tanks successfully brought political attention (and varying degrees of priority) to the respective issues and their accompanying policy proposals. The production of attention-grabbing research was the first step in this attention-generating process. In another way, this research was the first step in

[276] The question mark next to Grattan's name reflects the uncertainty surrounding the extent of the institutes impact. At a minimum, Grattan helped to bring attention to the issue, and may have played an important role in the reform process priorities.

creating an agenda for policy change. The institutes sought to define (or redefine) the issue and frame the ensuing debates in line with their values, beliefs, preferences and inferences.

This thesis shows that a think tank's organisational credibility and its individual scholar's expertise are crucial determinants of political and media attention. Both ingredients are evident across the three cases. Another common thread across the CIS and Grattan cases is the presence of a discernible policy window. More specifically, a focusing event, or a trigger, provoked the relevant think tank's interest and created space for its policy prescriptions (Kingdon, 2011, p. 169; van der Heijden et al., 2021). Their ideational contributions elevated the issues' salience and encouraged enduring political attention rather than transient attentiveness. Thus, the combination of a focusing event and the relevant think tank's research response fostered the political attention that is a necessary (but insufficient) condition for policy change.

The absence of a discernible policy window distinguishes the Lowy Institute case from the other two. In some ways, the lack of a so-called focusing event demonstrates Lowy's effectiveness in attracting political attention to the diplomatic deficit issue. But Lowy enjoyed only limited success in attaining its desired policy outcomes despite making the issue a political priority. Lowy created the momentum for policy change by elevating the issue's salience with political actors. Nevertheless, the power of the status quo (and competing political priorities) was too great to overcome in the absence of broader actor mobilisation (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Mintrom et al., 2014).

The lack of counter-mobilisation also distinguishes the Lowy Institute case. Whereas the Grattan Institute and the CIS encountered heated opposition to their proposals, the Lowy Institute enjoyed a consensus on the need for policy change. Perversely, this was a negative signal. Baumgartner et al. (2009, p. 57) find that a 'lack of countermobilisation is good predictor of failure'. This lack of opposition deprived Lowy of the opportunity to magnify the issue's salience beyond the political class. Public indifference and business community impassivity allowed successive governments to ultimately ignore Lowy's central proposal (to reverse the DFAT budget cuts). The government understood that despite Lowy's sophisticated submissions and Committee-level support for its proposals, the issue had a limited life span. Doing nothing was an easy and irresistible option for an Expenditure Review Committee obsessed with balanced budgets.

The lessons from the Lowy case have broad applicability. The case shows that even prominent think tanks with advanced policy capacities can be overwhelmed by an issue's characteristics and the political context – even when that think tank apparently enjoys political support for its proposals. The case demonstrates that think tanks can bring attention to public policy issues and convert those issues into political priorities but still fail to generate a policy priority.

This thesis also shows that agenda-setting is a primary objective of many Australian think tanks. This claim is not necessarily new or original – scholars have documented such findings for decades. Of more interest here is the evidence showing that many journalists and politicians consider think tanks to be most effective when they provide specific policy prescriptions. The Grattan Institute and the Lowy Institute specifically targeted policy formulation on the issues examined in Chapters Ten and Eleven. These respective issues became political priorities (via different pathways), and both institutes were at the heart of the respective issue debates. And although only the school funding issue (the Grattan case) became a policy priority, the potency of both institutes' submissions positioned them as influential actors in the respective debates.

Think tanks that target policy outcomes via the production of action-oriented proposals are more likely to attract the attention of political, media, and corporate elites than institutes that seek to persuade the broader policy environment by defining issues and setting agendas. This assertion does not diminish the importance of agenda setting as a legitimate and core think tank function. But if think tanks covet elite attention, the evidence in this thesis shows that they are more likely to succeed through the production of sophisticated policy research that challenges the status quo (Weiss, 1977). This is the modus operandi for government-affiliated and quasi-government institutes. Prominent institutes such as Grattan and CEDA also have an unremitting focus on policy formulation. Their prescriptive proposals make them more relevant to elites and augment their ability to influence policy debates and outcomes.

A focus on policy outcomes is not the exclusive domain of large institutes. Beyond Zero Emissions is a modestly-sized think tank but prioritises 'ambitious and audacious' research to attract the attention of elites in government and the corporate world (interview with Petrie, 2019). Appendix L shows that BZE has successfully exerted influence, and its ability to do so comes from its strategic investments in analytical policy capacities.

Many think tanks seek to influence the public rather than targeting policymakers directly. The link between public opinion and government policy has been empirically evidenced across various settings, providing support for this indirect approach (see, for example, W. Jennings and John, 2009; A. Martin et al., 2014; A. Campbell and Rigby, 2016). This thesis does not challenge the extent to which think tanks indirectly influence policy deliberations.[277] But indirect approaches more commonly privilege narrative-style outputs (reflecting the relative sophistication of the target audience) that are readily digestible rather than analytically penetrating, policy-ready proposals.

These divergent approaches have implications for the usage and influence of think tank outputs. Government officials participating in this inquiry's three case studies uniformly point to a fundamental manifestation of think tank influence: their role as policy legitimators. Policymakers across the case studies assert that they 'used' think tanks to legitimate their official proposals. That is, policymakers were leveraging think tank research to burnish the veracity of their contentions in the public sphere. In these cases, policymakers intrinsically accept that think tanks can and do play influential roles in the policy process. And importantly, the think tank research that government officials use to validate their ideas are action-oriented proposals that target policy formulation (consistent with Weiss, 1977). So, even though policy-specific think tank proposals might not influence ultimate policy decisions, they still play a distinctly influential role in the policy process (interviews with government officials for the school funding reform case suggest this best characterises the Grattan Institute's role in the debate).

12.6 Conclusion

This study shows that the Australian think tank industry has grown substantially over the past two decades. This growth is demand and supply-driven, with politicians increasingly welcoming external policy ideas (perhaps out of necessity), and policy entrepreneurs increasingly recognising think tanks' impact on policymaking. This growth has also left the Australian industry well-balanced: neither left-leaning nor right-leaning institutes dominate the landscape, despite the often-shrill proclamations from both sides (and the preponderance

[277] The CIS and the Grattan Institute complemented their direct and detailed proposals with efforts to persuade policymakers indirectly.

of scholarly literature that litigates the supposed dominance and impacts of right-leaning institutes). Media and political elites instead identify institutes across the ideological spectrum (and particularly centrist institutes) as making notable contributions to policymaking.

The federal government has played a crucial role in developing Australia's think tank industry, and a number of institutes owe their existence to government seed funding. These government investments have elevated the sector's credibility and have enabled the recipient institutes to establish sizable footprints in particular policy fields. But there remain gaps in policy-field coverage, and only additional government money is likely to fill those gaps.[278] Although private contributions have increased markedly in recent years, the federal government has been a key sponsor of autonomous think tanks since the turn of the century.

This thesis finds that Australian think tanks can be influential throughout the policy process. The actors surveyed for this study have different views on the manifestation of that influence, but there is a broad consensus that think tanks do influence policymaking. Part Three of this thesis evidences the nature of this influence. The study also shows that expert audiences – the most common targets of think tank influence – engage with think tank outputs in distinct ways. These variations largely reflect political elites' divergent perspectives on the utility of think tank scholarship – a circumstance unlikely to be unique to Australia despite the country's unique political and institutional environment. International scholars might test the broader applicability of these findings.

To be sure, think tank influence is not likely to be common. The sheer volume of policy-relevant material competing for policymaker attention makes it impossible for any interest group to impose itself consistently. A shortcoming of this study is that it focuses on three prominent think tanks that are well-positioned to exert policy influence (via their impressive policy capacities). These prototypical think tanks are outliers across several metrics, but that is a common feature of the Australian industry: there is no typical Australian think tank. Think tanks devoid of the features and capacities conducive to policy influence are assuredly less likely to exert it.

Part Two of this thesis illustrates the tremendous diversity in Australia's think tank industry. This thesis' three case studies therefore show what is possible, although not necessarily common. The diversity in the three cases comes from the variation in the nature

[278] For a discussion on the gaps in Australia's foreign policy field, see Hagland (2021) and Commonwealth of Australia (2021).

of the policy issues but not necessarily from the structure and characteristics of the think tanks. The cases cover social (child protection and adoption), political (investments in diplomatic infrastructure), and economic (school funding) issues. And the think tanks germane to each issue are shown to be influential (in different ways) across all three areas.

Future research might instead consider think tanks with divergent structural characteristics. An examination of party-affiliated and quasi-government institutes would be particularly interesting, as would a more extensive exploration of the public goods proffered by think-and-do-tanks. The present thesis nevertheless illustrates that these unique entities should be more seriously accepted as important parts of Australia's policymaking landscape. They can play a discernible role in the policy process and can improve the quality of policy solutions, ultimately to the benefit of all Australians.

Appendices

Appendix A: Australia's Think Tank Population

Australia 21	Institute for Civil Society
Australia China Relations Institute	Institute for Economics and Peace
Australia Defence Association	Institute for Private Enterprise
Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics	Institute for Regional Security
Australian Environment Foundation	Institute of Agriculture
Australian Fabians	Institute of Public Affairs
Australian Farm Institute	Institute of Transport and Logistical Studies
Australian Health Policy Collaboration	International Water Centre
Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute	John Curtin Research Centre
Australian Human Rights Commission	Lowy Institute
Australian Institute for Progress	Mannkal Economic Education Foundation
Australian Institute of Criminology	McKell Institute
Australian Institute of Employment Rights	Melbourne Institute
Australian Institute of Family Studies	Menzies Research Centre
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Mitchell Institute
Australian Institute of International Affairs	National Security College
Australian Institute of Policy and Science	newDemocracy
Australian Law Reform Commission	Ngara Institute
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	Per Capita
Beyond Zero Emissions	Perth USAsia Centre
Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics	PM Glynn Institute
Centre for Applied Economic Research	Policy Cures Research
Centre for Future Work (sub-TAI)	Productivity Commission
Centre for Policy Development	Prosper Australia Research Institute
Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research	Rail Futures Institute
Chifley Research Centre	Regional Australia Institute
China Matters	RSA ANZ
Climate Change Institute	SAGE International Australia
Climate Council	Samuel Griffith Society
Committee for Adelaide	Social Policy Research Centre
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	South Australian Centre for Economic Studies
Committee for Melbourne	Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
Committee for Perth	Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia
Development Policy Centre	The Australia Institute
Doctors Reform Society	The Australian APEC Study Centre
Ethos EA Centre for Christianity and Society	The Centre for Independent Studies
Evatt Foundation	The Committee for Sydney
Freedom for Faith	The Global CCS Institute
Future Directions International	The Page Research Centre
Global Access Partners	The Sir Richard Williams Foundation
Grattan Institute	The Sydney Institute
Green Institute	The Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering
Griffith Asia Institute	TJ Ryan Foundation
HR Nicholls Society	United States Studies Centre
Indonesia Institute	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
Indonesia Project	Whitlam Institute
Infrastructure Partnerships Australia	

* The identification process occurred between October and December 2018

** Upon review in October 2021, and based on the evolution of their activities or focus, six entities would be removed from this list:

- Australian Human Rights Commission
- International Water Centre
- Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia
- The Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering
- Australian Institute of Employment Rights
- Institute for Private Enterprise

*** Three entities would be added to this list:

- Asia Society Policy Institute
- Asialink
- Blueprint Australia

Appendix B: Survey Questions

This appendix only includes survey *questions*. It does not include the survey introduction or the instructions detailed in the Qualtrics template. The participants in each survey group might not receive all questions due to the embedded skip logic in the individual surveys. The think tank survey is presented first, followed by the journalist survey and then the parliamentarian survey.

Think tank survey

To start, here are a few descriptive questions about your organisation.

- When was your entity founded?
    - 2011 or later
    - Between 2001 and 2010
    - Between 1991 and 2000
    - 1990 or earlier

- How would you describe the ideological orientation of your entity?
    - Socially liberal / Progressive
    - Free market / Conservative
    - Centrist / Non-ideological

Now for some questions about the funding of your entity.

In the two items below, read the statement and choose the best single response.

- My entity can achieve its stated objectives with its current level of funding:
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

- If the funding of my entity immediately increased by 50%, our top two priorities would be to:
    - Hold more events to discuss policy issues.
    - Improve our technology or online presence.
    - Broaden our research focus by recruiting experts in new policy areas.
    - Deepen analysis in existing policy areas.
    - Engage in more extensive marketing of our research.
    - Dedicate more resources to engagement with politicians.
    - Do something different to those listed above.

In the following section, there are a couple of questions about your methods and ideas.

Please read the following statements and rank each response from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

- The most effective way for my entity to achieve its objectives is to:
    - produce comprehensive, in-depth reports.
        - SD, D, N, A, SA
    - produce concise policy briefs.
        - SD, D, N, A, SA
    - ensure we respond swiftly and become vocal on developing issues.
        - SD, D, N, A, SA
    - provide a forum for issues to be discussed and debated.
        - SD, D, N, A, SA

- The effective marketing of ideas (or research) is at least as important as the quality of the ideas (or research).
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

The next section focuses on your beliefs regarding the external perceptions and understandings of public policy institutes.

Please read the following statements and choose the best <u>single</u> response.

- Federal Parliamentarians believe that policy institutes play a discernible role in the policymaking process.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

- The broad policy institute industry is viewed as being credible by the Australian public.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

- The public reputation of my entity is important for it to be effective.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree

- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The next several questions focus on the influence of policy institutes. Influence has been said to imply 'that a person can sometimes sway, persuade, or otherwise have an effect upon those who control from a position of authority.'[279] Please consider this interpretation when responding to the items below.

In these first two questions, please select the best single response.

- Do you believe that your institute has had an influence on public policy?
  - Yes, we have had a significant impact on public policy
  - Yes, we have influenced policy debates, but it is difficult to say whether we have influenced policy outcomes
  - I'm unsure; it is difficult to determine
  - No, there are too many competing forces for us to claim we have influenced policy

- At what stage of the policy cycle do you believe policy institutes, in general, can be most effective in influencing public policy?
  - The agenda setting or issue identification stage
  - The policy formulation stage
  - The policy implementation stage
  - At no point in the policy cycle are policy institutes influential

Please read the next statement and order the responses from one (1) to four (4), with one (1) being the most important.

- My organisation is able to achieve its goals because of its:
  - objectivity
  - credibility
  - independence
  - expertise

Please read the following statement and rank each response from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

- The influence of my entity can be inferred from:
  - The observable policy impact of my entity's work
    - SD, D, N, A, SA
  - My entity's participation in Parliamentary inquiries and hearings
    - SD, D, N, A, SA
  - The number of visits to my entity's website
    - SD, D, N, A, SA

[279] Domhoff 1967

- The frequency with which my entity is referenced in the media
  - SD, D, N, A, SA
- The number of publications my entity produces
  - SD, D, N, A, SA
- The number of social media followers my entity has
  - SD, D, N, A, SA
- The attendance at my entity's conferences and seminars
  - SD, D, N, A, SA

And finally, in this section;

- Some policy institutes identify the influence of public policy as one of their primary objectives. Please select up to two (2) of the following to best describe your entity:
  - We attempt to influence public policy through engagement with the media
  - We attempt to influence public policy through direct communication with politicians
  - We attempt to influence public policy through our participation in Parliamentary inquiries and hearings
  - We attempt to influence public policy by producing persuasive research
  - We do not attempt to influence public policy

And finally, a couple of demographic questions. To reiterate, this information will be anonymised. Only aggregate data will be presented in the thesis.

- What is the amount of your most recent annual *expense* budget?
  - Less than $250,000
  - Between $250,001 and $1,000,000
  - Between $1,000,001 and $5,000,000
  - Greater than $5,000,001
  - Prefer not to say

- How many individuals (whether they be Directors, executives, fellows, scholars, or others operating in a professional capacity) have completed research on behalf of your entity since June 30, 2018?
  - 1 – 3
  - 4 – 10
  - 11 – 20
  - 21 or more
  - We do not produce research

Thank you very much for your participation. The survey is now complete.

Journalist survey

To start off, here are a couple of descriptive questions about you and your role.

- Which of the following categories best describes the newspaper with which you are predominantly associated?
    - National or major metropolitan
    - Other capital city-based
    - Regional

- For how long have you covered politics as a journalist?
    - Less than 5 years
    - Between 6 and 10 years (inclusive)
    - More than 10 years

The next two questions ask you to think about your interactions, if any, with think tanks. Please select the best single response for each question.

- How often do you directly communicate with think tank representatives? In this case, 'direct communication' means engaging in conversation with a think tank representative (in any role) over the phone, in-person, or electronically.
    - I never directly communicate with think tank representatives
    - Up to and including ten times per year
    - More than ten times per year

- How often do you receive, either directly or indirectly, think tank products or research?
    - I never receive research (or other products) from think tanks
    - Up to and including ten times per year
    - More than ten times per year

In this next section, consider think tanks from a broader industry perspective, not from an individual entity perspective. Please choose the best single response.

- Think tanks can be generally regarded as credible sources of information.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

Complete the following sentence by selecting one response.

- Think tanks can have the greatest influence on public policy when:
    - they target public opinion via the media.
    - they directly provide expertise to politicians.
    - they participate in Parliamentary inquiries and hearings.
    - I'm unsure.

The following section asks you to focus on think tank research.

- I have found think tank research to be useful when writing on public policy issues:
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

Next, select the single response to the following question:

- Which think tanks are more effective at marketing their ideas through the media?
    - Those with a right-of-centre orientation
    - Those with a left-of-centre orientation
    - Those with no ideological persuasion
    - There is no discernible difference between think tanks generally

And finally, in this section:

- What is your preferred format of think tank research?
    - Comprehensive, in-depth reports
    - Policy briefs, restricted to a few of pages
    - I have received, but do not read think tank research
    - I have never received any think tank research

The following question(s) focus on the topic of think tank influence. Influence has been said to imply 'that a person can sometimes sway, persuade, or otherwise have an effect upon those who control from a position of authority.'[280] Please consider this interpretation when responding to the items below.

In the first two questions, please select the best single response.

- Do you believe that think tanks have an influence on public policy?
    - Yes, I believe think tanks have an influence on policymaking
    - Yes, think tanks have an influence on policy debates, but it is difficult to say whether they have an influence on policy outcomes
    - I'm unsure; it is difficult to determine
    - No, there are too many competing forces for any one organisation to have an identifiable influence on public policy
    - No, think tanks are not relevant in policymaking

- At what stage of the policy cycle do you believe that think tanks can have the greatest impact on public policy?
    - Agenda setting / issue identification stage

[280] Domhoff 1967

- Policy formulation stage
- Policy implementation stage
- I'm unsure

In the final question of the survey, it would be appreciated if you could spend a moment thinking about some of the think tanks you have encountered.

- Please name up to three think tanks you believe have had an influence on public policy.
  - A
  - B
  - C

Thank you very much for your participation. The survey is now complete.

Parliamentarian survey

To start off, here are a few descriptive questions about you and your role.

- Of which political party are you member?
    - Coalition
    - Australian Labor Party
    - Other party

- For how long have you been a member of the Australian Federal Parliament?
    - Less than 5 years
    - Between 6 and 10 years (inclusive)
    - Greater than 10 years

The next two questions ask you to think about your interactions, if any, with think tanks. Please select the best single response for each question.

- How often do you directly communicate with think tank representatives? In this case, 'direct communication' means engaging in conversation with a think tank representative (in any role) over the phone, in-person, or electronically.
    - I never directly communicate with think tank representatives
    - Up to and including times per year
    - More than ten times per year

- How often do you receive, either directly or indirectly, think tank products or research?
    - I never receive research (or other products) from think tanks
    - Up to and including times per year
    - More than ten times per year

In the following statement, consider think tanks from a broader industry perspective, not from an individual entity perspective.

- Think tanks can be generally regarded as credible sources of information.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

Complete the following sentence by selecting one response.

- Think tanks can have the most influence on public policy when:
    - they target public opinion via the media.
    - they directly provide expertise to politicians.
    - they participate in Parliamentary inquiries and hearings.
    - I'm unsure.

The following section asks you to focus on think tank research. Read each statement and select the single best response to each.

- I have found think tank research to be useful when deliberating over public policy.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neither Agree nor Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

- My political party will reference think tank research in internal policy discussions.
    - Frequently
    - Occasionally
    - Rarely
    - Never

And finally, in this section:

- What is your preferred format of think tank research?
    - Comprehensive, in-depth reports
    - Policy briefs or summary research restricted to a few of pages
    - I have received, but do not read think tank research
    - No preference

The next two questions focus on the topic of think tank influence. Influence has been said to imply 'that a person can sometimes sway, persuade, or otherwise have an effect upon those who control from a position of authority.'[281] Please consider this interpretation when responding to the items below.

In the first two questions, please select the best single response.

- Do you believe that think tanks have an influence on public policy?
    - Yes, I believe think tanks have an influence on policymaking
    - Yes, think tanks have an influence on policy debates, but it is difficult to say whether they influence policy outcomes
    - I'm unsure; it is difficult to determine
    - No, there are too many competing forces for any one organisation to have an identifiable influence on public policy
    - No, think tanks are not relevant in policymaking

- At what stage of the policy cycle do you believe that think tanks can have the greatest impact on public policy?
    - Agenda setting / issue identification stage
    - Policy formulation stage
    - Policy implementation stage

[281] Domhoff

- I'm unsure

In the final question of the survey, it would be appreciated if you could spend a moment thinking about some of the think tanks you are aware of.

- Please name up to three think tanks you believe have had an influence on public policy.
  - A
  - B
  - C

Thank you very much for your participation. The survey is now complete.

Appendix C: Survey Response Data

This appendix provides further response data on the three survey categories that form part of this broader study.

Think Tank Survey	
Available participants (eligible contacts)	87
Total recorded responses	71
Response rate	82%
Most-senior executive as respondent	79%
Average solicitations per response	2.7
Pre-distribution email solicitations	49
Response rate (with pre-distribution solicitation)	80%
Response rate (ex pre-distribution solicitation)	82%

Journalist Survey	
Available participants (eligible contacts)	163
Total recorded responses	65
Response rate	40%
Total Responses - Nine Entertainment	49%
Total Respones - News Limited	37%
Total Responses - Australian Community Media	14%

Parliamentarian Survey	
Available participants	241
Total recorded responses	50
Response rate	21%
Responses - Senate	18
Respones - House	32

Appendix D: Interview Participants

Think tank interviewees

Interviewee	Policy Institute	Date
Des Moore	Institute for Private Enterprise	5-Jul-19
Greg Lindsay	CIS	13-Aug-19
Iain Walker	newDemocracy	14-Aug-19
Katie McRobert	Australian Farm Institute	14-Aug-19
Alex Oliver	Lowy Institute	14-Aug-19
Travers McLeod	CPD	19-Aug-19
Jarrod Ball	CEDA	19-Aug-19
Jen Jackson	Mitchell Institute	20-Aug-19
Emma Dawson	Per Capita	20-Aug-19
John Roskam	IPA	20-Aug-19
John Daley	Grattan Institute	21-Aug-19
Vanessa Petrie	BZE	21-Aug-19
Michael Fotheringham	AHURI	21-Aug-19
Bryce Wakefield	AIIA	26-Aug-19
Garth Pratten	SDSC	27-Aug-19
Rory Medcalf	National Security College	27-Aug-19
Kim Houghton	Regional Australia Institute	27-Aug-19
Peter Jennings	ASPI	27-Aug-19
Ralph Lattimore	Productivity Commission	28-Aug-19
Jim Stanford	Centre for Future Work	29-Aug-19
Adrian Dwyer	Infrastructure Partners Australia	3-Sep-19
Brett Gale	Chifley Research Centre	9-Sep-19
Graham Young	Australian Institute for Progress	18-Sep-19
Philipa Duthie	RSA	18-Sep-19
Jeremy Sammut	CIS	25-Sep-19
Mary Crawford	TJ Ryan Foundation	27-Sep-19
John Bruni	SAGE International	8-Oct-19
Andrew Pickford	Mannkal Economic Education Foundation	9-Oct-19
Alex Dayant	Lowy Institute	9-Oct-19
Simon Jackman	USSC	11-Oct-19
Julia Thornton / Jack Halliday	Fabians	11-Oct-19
Gordon Flake	Perth USAsia	16-Oct-19
Nick Dyrenfurth	Curtin Research Centre	16-Oct-19
Chris Sheil	Evatt Foundation	18-Oct-19
Kristian Jenkins	Page Research Centre	21-Oct-19
John Gray	HR Nicholls	21-Oct-19
Neil James	Australia Defence Association	22-Oct-19
Leanne Smith	Whitlam Institute	28-Oct-19
Anonymous Interviewee Z	N/A	29-Oct-19
Nick Cater / James Mathias	Menzies Research Centre	30-Oct-19
Eamon Waterford	Committee for Sydney	31-Oct-19
Anonymous Interviewee A	N/A	14-Nov-19
Marion Terrill	Grattan Institute	9-Dec-19
Gabriel Metcalf	Committee for Sydney	11-Dec-19
Michael Casey	PM Glynn	18-May-20
Renee Gorman	IPA	2-Jun-20
Anonymous Interviewee Y	N/A	3-Jun-20

Journalist interviewees

Interviewee	Newspaper	Date
Tom McIlroy	AFR	22-Apr-20
Luke Malpass	AFR	24-Apr-20
Doug Dingwall	Canberra Times	24-Apr-20
Phillip Coorey	AFR	27-Apr-20
Anonymous Interviewee C	N/A	29-Apr-20
Tim Dodd	The Australian	1-May-20
Elias Visontay	The Australian	4-May-20
Myriam Robin	AFR	8-May-20
Ross Gittins	SMH	13-May-20
Jacqueline Maley	SMH	18-May-20

Parliamentarian interviewees

Interviewee	Chamber	Date
Wayne Swan	N/A	28-Nov-19
Anonymous Interviewee N	House	11-Sep-20
Anonymous Interviewee R	House	14-Sep-20
Anonymous Interviewee Q	House	14-Sep-20
Anonymous Interviewee M	House	16-Sep-20
Anonymous Interviewee W	House	21-Sep-20
Anonymous Interviewee X	Senate	28-Sep-20
Anonymous Interviewee J	House	28-Sep-20
Anonymous Interviewee K	House	2-Oct-20
Anonymous Interviewee I	Senate	2-Oct-20
Anonymous Interviewee O	House	8-Oct-20
Anonymous Interviewee H	Senate	23-Oct-20
Anonymous Interviewee P	House	28-Oct-20
Anonymous Interviewee L	Senate	3-Nov-20
Anonymous Interviewee T	House	22-Jul-21
Anonymous Interviewee U	House	9-Sep-21
Anonymous Interviewee V	House	14-Sep-21

Other interviewees

Interviewee	Entity	Date
John McLeod	JBWere Philanthropy	12-May-20
Matthew Brennan	Transurban	11-Aug-20

Chapter Nine (CIS) interviewees

Interviewee	Entity	Date
Jeremy Sammut (1)	CIS	10-Sep-20
Susan Tregeagle	Barnardos	23-Sep-20
Jeremy Sammut (2)	CIS	23-Sep-20
Anonymous Interviewee D	NSW Government	30-Sep-20
Philip Mendes	Monash University	1-Oct-20
Pru Goward	NSW Government	9-Oct-20
Anthony Benscher	Barton Deakin	12-Oct-20
Cass Wilkinson	NSW Treasury	13-Oct-20
Andrew McCallum	ACWA	14-Oct-20
Renee Carter	Adopt Change	21-Oct-20
Anonymous Interviewee E	NSW Government	26-Nov-20

Chapter Ten (Grattan) interviewees

Interviewee	Entity	Date
John Daley	ex-Grattan Institute	3-Mar-21
Pete Goss	ex-Grattan Institute	3-Mar-21
Scott Prasser	ex-Liberal Party	8-Mar-21
Colette Colman	ex-ISCA	15-Mar-21
Glenn Savage	University of Melbourne	15-Mar-21
Correna Haythorpe	Australian Education Union	16-Mar-21
Tom Greenwell	N/A	16-Mar-21
Phillip Spratt	ACSSO	18-Mar-21
Rob Nairn	Australian Secondary Principals Association	19-Apr-21
Anonymous Interviewee G	Catholic Education	26-Apr-21
Mark Spencer	Christian Schools Australia	27-Apr-21
Anonymous Interviewee F	N/A	N/A

Chapter Eleven (Lowy) interviewees

Interviewee	Entity	Date
Alex Oliver	Lowy Institute	8-Dec-20
James Wise (1)	Australian Diplomat (ex)	21-Dec-20
Allan Gyngell (1)	AIIA (ex Lowy)	21-Dec-20
Peter Varghese	University of Queensland	21-Jan-21
Dave Sharma	Liberal Party	27-Jan-21
David Engel	ASPI	28-Jan-21
Fergus Hanson	ASPI	28-Jan-21
James Wise (2)	Australian Diplomat (ex)	12-Feb-21
Allan Gyngell (2)	AIIA (ex Lowy)	16-Feb-21
Nick Champion	ALP	16-Feb-21

Appendix E: Indicative Interview Guides

This appendix contains sample interview guides for this study's think tank, journalist, and parliamentarian interviews. These guides represent a starting point. Most interviews were individually structured based on pre-interview entity analysis.

Think tank interviews

1. Having reviewed your organisation's website, I'm familiar with your activities, but could you briefly explain your objectives and guiding philosophy?

2. In the pursuit of your objectives, you list numerous target audiences, BUT who are your efforts primarily directed toward – who would you regard as your primary target audience?
    a. Is having political access important for you to be able to achieve your objectives?
        i. Government departments? How welcoming are they to your engagement?
    b. Do you conduct reviews of party platforms / programs / policies when determining your research focus?

3. Describe the importance of generating original ideas when pursuing your goals.
    a. While acknowledging your in-house research capabilities, are you trafficking in existing ideas?

4. I'd like to focus a little on the question of influence. You have multiple target audiences; to be unequivocal, are you trying to influence them on the merits of your perspectives and ideas?
    a. [If yes] Are your influence efforts more so directed toward influencing the policy environment or to influence policy outcomes?
        i. Do you believe it is possible for a think tank to directly influence policy outcomes?
    b. [If yes] Over what period does it typically take for your ideas or policy prescriptions to have an impact?
    c. [If yes] Can you explain how the prevailing political landscape might impact your [ability to influence] / [efforts]?

5. Does your focus on a particular part of the policy cycle change depending on the prevailing political landscape? For example, are there circumstances where you might focus more short term on policy outcomes versus longer-term agenda setting?

6. I'd like to expand a little on the areas and ways you have been able to achieve your goals. First of all, how do you determine whether you have been successful?

7. Can you give a specific example of an issue where you believe you have had a definitive impact on either a policy outcome or the policy environment?

8. Can you provide an example of an issue you pursued where you believe you have been or were unsuccessful? Why?

9. Can you describe the impact that new media has had on how you operate?

10. What role do parliamentary submissions play in your broader suite of methods?

11. Does your research go through an internal consultation process before being released?
    a. Are your papers workshopped across the entity, or are they released / published on the back of the author's expertise alone?

12. I'd like to briefly discuss your thoughts about the think tank industry more generally. What do you see the industry doing well?
    a. Ideological orientation aside, why do you think some institutes either lose effectiveness or fail to be influential?

13. Finally, can you give me your thoughts on how important you think the industry is, in general, to the policymaking process?

Journalist interviewees

1. First of all, could you briefly describe your current role with the [newspaper]?

2. As a part of that role, can you describe why you might – if at all – encounter the work of think tanks?

3. Can you explain how you come to receive think tanks materials or ideas?
    a. Do you solicit work from think tanks?
    b. Do they routinely send you information?

4. Many think tanks actively pursue media coverage. Why do you think that is the case?

5. What are your perceptions regarding the extent of think tank influence?
    a. On public opinion?
    b. On policymaking?

6. Think tanks are consistently quoted in the media. What are your thoughts regarding the credibility of these entities in the eyes of the public?

7. What is your perception of the value of think tanks' research?

8. Are there particular think tanks (or a group of think tanks) with whom you typically engage?

9. Finally, is there a policy issue on which you believe a particular think tank has had a discernible influence?

Parliamentarian interviewees

1. What role do think tanks play in the policy process?
    a. Are they important?
    b. Can they be influential?

2. How relevant or prominent are think tanks to the internal policy discussions of the [relevant] Party?

3. Are think tanks on the left or the right more successful in engaging their aligned party and influencing policy prescriptions?

4. Is the extent of think tank influence on party policy impacted by whether you govern versus in opposition?

5. Do you value their contributions when forming your policy/intellectual views?

6. Should think tanks prioritise values or an evidence base when prosecuting policy issues?

7. Are there particular think tanks that you think make a noteworthy contribution to policymaking?

Appendix F: Candidate Case Study List

Referenced by	Entity	Topic	Selective quotes
Neil James	ADA	'First principles' review completed by Abbott government	'we managed an incoming government to do that'
Katie McRobert	AFI	'Precision-to-decision' project	'definitely changed policy direction in Australian agriculture'
Michael Fotheringham	AHURI	Bond aggregator model	'the work that we did that helped to guide the thinking'
Graham Young	AIP	Challenging proposed electric vehicle policy by ALP	'where we had most influence'
Peter Jennings	ASPI	China 5G risks	'we've had some quite decisive work'
Vanessa Petrie	BZE	Stationary energy plan	'the federal government for the first time in 2013 did their own modelling because of our report'
Vanessa Petrie	BZE	Low carbon cement - Transurban	'they contacted us and we started a dialogue about how we might support them'
Jarrod Ball	CEDA	Federal financial intergovernmental arrangements (COAG)	'do I think we were solely responsible for that? No'
Brett Gale	Chifley	Environmental laws	'that work was taken up and adopted basically into the Labor Party platform'
Greg Lindsay	CIS	Aboriginal affairs	'what it did was changed the grounds of debate'
Jeremy Sammut	CIS	CSR Virtue Signalling	'there was a lot of people complaining about the issue but nobody really putting up a solution'
Jeremy Sammut	CIS	Child protection and adoption	'I inspired the current [NSW] government to reform it's system in line with what I was saying'
Eamon Waterford	Comm Syd	Night-time economy (lock-out laws)	'this is an area where we were very successful'
Travers McLeod	CPD	Directors duties on climate risk ('Hutley Opinion')	'I think that's definitely a causal win that we would claim'
Travers McLeod	CPD	'Cities and Settlement Initiative' - Wyndham, VIC	'that's a much more effective example of impact than 10 op-eds and a bunch of media appearances'
Nick Dyrenfurth	Curtin	Employee representation on Boards	'we've been able to drive the debate...we were able to get up a motion which supported the principle'
John Daley	Grattan	Superannuation reform	'we were probably the dominant voice in public'
John Daley	Grattan	School funding reforms	'the amendments that were passed were clearly very heavily influenced by the work that Grattan had done'
Marion Terrell	Grattan	Congestion charging	'I wanted to make a constructive contribution and hopefully improve the quality of the debate'
John Gray	HRN	Small business engagement	'reaching out to small business and showing them...there is an organisation that is willing to fight for them'
Adrian Dwyer	InfraPA	'Fixing Freight': Freight data hub	'it was a direct result of the work that we had done...we said do something and they did it'
John Roskam	IPA	Carbon tax / emissions trading scheme	'we did a lot of work on climate change and that's been significant'
Des Moore	IPE	Electricity privatisation	'I did quite a lot of work on that...whether it was due to me or not is another matter'
Alex Oliver	Lowy	Diplomatic Deficit	'we know that there was some influence on the thinking of the government at the time'
Alex Dayant	Lowy	Asia Power Index	'it seems since its launch last year, the Pacific Aid Map has been pretty useful not only for DFAT'
Andrew Pickford	Mannkal	Education and scholarship program	'provide young West Australian's the opportunity to learn about entrepreneurship, the free market'
Nick Cater	Menzies	New Colombo Plan	'entirely an initiative of the MRC...one of the best pieces of policy-ready research that the MRC ever did'
Jen Jackson	Mitchell	Three-year old preschool program	'extensively reference the Mitchell Institute work in their communication'
Iain Walker	newDemo	City of Melbourne budget reform	'it was a super-effective project for [the] City of Melbourne...they acted on the decision'
Rory Medcalf	NSC	'China's economic leverage: Perception and Reality'	'I believe that our paper helped the internal debate within government'
Kristian Jenkins	Page	Literature review - immigrant settlement in regional Australia	'we did that research...and it was used as a springboard or launching pad for further work within government'
Emma Dawson	Per Capita	JobStart / NewStart debate (Report: 'Working it Out')	'I think we've had a significant impact, or influence on the thinking in Canberra'
Emma Dawson	Per Capita	Applied policy testing thru co-design (older women at risk)	'we hear the needs of people directly from them and then we distil that into policy lessons that we can apply'
Gordon Flake	PerthUSAsia	Critical minerals / rare earths	'we were the world leaders on this topic'
Ralph Lattimore	ProComm	Superannuation reform	'the government has embraced that'
Ralph Lattimore	ProComm	Paid Parental Leave	'the government just introduced it 100%'
Kim Houghton	RAI	Leadership program for regional development	'instead of trying to convince the government agency they should fund something like that, we just go and do it'
John Bruni	SAGE	Submarine competitive evaluation program	'a very impactful event...we got this huge 'holy crap' moment and that reverberated both in Canberra and elsewhere'
John Bruni	SAGE	Media reporting on counter-terrorism	the most important thing that we have had some influence on'
Simon Jackman	USSC	Indispensable economic partners (report)	'I'm just going, 'check, that was in our report, check'...I'm just hearing stuff that we; our form of words that we put together'
Leanne Smith	Whitlam	Protecting indigenous cultural heritage	'it will be a bit of a slow burner I would think'

Appendix G: Think Tanks by Size

This appendix sorts the Australian think tank population by size. According to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission size classifications, large institutes have revenues over $1 million, medium-sized entities have revenues between $250 thousand and $1 million, and small entities have revenues below $250 thousand.

Large Think Tanks

Australia China Relations Institute	Institute for Economics and Peace
Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics	Institute of Agriculture
Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute	Institute of Public Affairs
Australian Human Rights Commission	Institute of Transport and Logistical Studies
Australian Institute of Criminology	Lowy Institute
Australian Institute of Family Studies	McKell Institute
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Melbourne Institute
Australian Law Reform Commission	Menzies Research Centre
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	Mitchell Institute
Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics	National Security College
Centre for Policy Development	Perth USAsia Centre
Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research	Policy Cures Research
Climate Change Institute	Productivity Commission
Climate Council	Regional Australia Institute
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	Social Policy Research Centre
Committee for Melbourne	South Australian Centre for Economic Studies
Committee for Perth	Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
Development Policy Centre	The Australia Institute
Future Directions International	The Australian APEC Study Centre
Global Access Partners	The Centre for Independent Studies
Grattan Institute	The Committee for Sydney
Griffith Asia Institute	The Global CCS Institute
Indonesia Project	The Sydney Institute
Infrastructure Partnerships Australia	United States Studies Centre

Medium Think Tanks

Australia Defence Association
Australian Farm Institute
Australian Health Policy Collaboration
Australian Institute of Employment Rights
Australian Institute of International Affairs
Australian Institute of Policy and Science
Beyond Zero Emissions
Centre for Applied Economic Research
Chifley Research Centre
China Matters
Committee for Adelaide
Freedom for Faith
Institute for Regional Security
International Water Centre
newDemocracy
Per Capita
PM Glynn Institute
Rail Futures Institute
Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia
The Sir Richard Williams Foundation
The Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering
Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
Whitlam Institute

Small Think Tanks

Australia 21
Australian Environment Foundation
Australian Fabians
Australian Institute for Progress
Centre for Future Work (sub-TAI)
Doctors Reform Society
Ethos EA Centre for Christianity and Society
Evatt Foundation
Green Institute
HR Nicholls Society
Indonesia Institute
Institute for Civil Society
Institute for Private Enterprise
John Curtin Research Centre
Mannkal Economic Education Foundation
Ngara Institute
Prosper Australia Research Institute
RSA ANZ
SAGE International Australia
Samuel Griffith Society
The Page Research Centre
TJ Ryan Foundation

Appendix H: Think Tank Ideological Orientation

This appendix separates the Australian think tank population by ideological orientation. Right-leaning institutes include those with a free-market and conservative orientation (including three religion-focused institutes). Left-leaning institutes are those with a progressive orientation (and include all those that focus on social issues and climate-related issues). All others are classified as centrist.

Centrist Think Tanks

Australia China Relations Institute	Griffith Asia Institute
Australia Defence Association	Indonesia Institute
Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics	Indonesia Project
Australian Farm Institute	Infrastructure Partnerships Australia
Australian Health Policy Collaboration	Institute for Regional Security
Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute	Institute of Agriculture
Australian Human Rights Commission	Institute of Transport and Logistical Studies
Australian Institute of Criminology	International Water Centre
Australian Institute of Employment Rights	Lowy Institute
Australian Institute of Family Studies	Melbourne Institute
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Mitchell Institute
Australian Institute of International Affairs	National Security College
Australian Institute of Policy and Science	newDemocracy
Australian Law Reform Commission	Perth USAsia Centre
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	Policy Cures Research
Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics	Productivity Commission
Centre for Applied Economic Research	Rail Futures Institute
Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research	Regional Australia Institute
China Matters	SAGE International Australia
Climate Change Institute	Social Policy Research Centre
Committee for Adelaide	South Australian Centre for Economic Studies
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
Committee for Melbourne	Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia
Committee for Perth	The Australian APEC Study Centre
Development Policy Centre	The Committee for Sydney
Future Directions International	The Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering
Global Access Partners	United States Studies Centre
Grattan Institute	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists

Right-leaning Think Tanks

Australian Environment Foundation
Australian Institute for Progress
Ethos EA Centre for Christianity and Society
Freedom for Faith
HR Nicholls Society
Institute for Civil Society
Institute for Private Enterprise
Institute of Public Affairs
Mannkal Economic Education Foundation
Menzies Research Centre
PM Glynn Institute
Samuel Griffith Society
The Centre for Independent Studies
The Page Research Centre
The Sir Richard Williams Foundation
The Sydney Institute

Left-leaning Think Tanks

Australia 21
Australian Fabians
Beyond Zero Emissions
Centre for Future Work (sub-TAI)
Centre for Policy Development
Chifley Research Centre
Climate Council
Doctors Reform Society
Evatt Foundation
Green Institute
Institute for Economics and Peace
John Curtin Research Centre
McKell Institute
Ngara Institute
Per Capita
Prosper Australia Research Institute
RSA ANZ
The Australia Institute
The Global CCS Institute
TJ Ryan Foundation
Whitlam Institute

Appendix I: Prominence Measures

This appendix details the metrics used to determine institute prominence. The tables cover the seven entities included in the Chapter Four analysis (although they exclude the eight prominent government-affiliated institutes). The metrics include data sourced from Factiva on July 4, 2020, with the search criteria 'All Australian and NZ newspapers', from November 1, 2016, to October 31, 2018. A (federal) Hansard search on May 15, 2020, for the dates January 1, 2010, to March 7, 2020, provides additional citation data. The Hansard search criteria included institutes' full name as well as commonly used acronyms (while excluding duplicates). The 'multimedia metric' is subjective, and considers institutes' use of digital interactives, podcasts, videos, and social platforms. The 'survey identifications' metric denotes journalist and parliamentarian citations in this study's original surveys (respondents nominated up to three institutes they believe exerted policy influence). Parliamentary submissions account for institutes participation in public inquiries and hearings. The 'minister meetings' metric assesses the ability for institutes to gain in-person audiences with government ministers (based on interview data).

There are several institutes (twelve, in fact) that sit on the border of 'prominence' (most of whom would accurately state that they are prominent entities in the plain-English incarnation of the term). But prominence here is given a specific meaning, so institutes such as AHURI, the Australian Farm Institute, and the United States Studies Centre do not make this more prescriptive list.

Full name	Factiva Citations	Hansard	Multi Media Metric
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	1101	373	High
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	476	145	High
Grattan Institute	2059	604	Medium
Institute of Public Affairs	1089	310	High
Lowy Institute	1303	216	High
The Australia Institute	1221	562	High
The Centre for Independent Studies	713	106	High

Full name	Survey Indentifications	Parliamentary Subs.	Minister Meetings
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	14	Unknown	Yes
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	1	Limited	Yes
Grattan Institute	59	Yes	Yes
Institute of Public Affairs	49	Yes	Yes
Lowy Institute	26	Yes	Yes
The Australia Institute	54	Yes	Yes
The Centre for Independent Studies	16	Limited	Yes

Appendix J: Government Grants

This appendix sources grant data from the federal government's Grant Connect website. The data was sourced on December 1, 2019, for the period commencing December 31, 2017, until the search date.

The tables exclude grants to the party-affiliated Menzies Research Centre, Chifley Research Centre, Page Research Centre, and Green Institute, and grants to international institutes. Grants are summed if there are multiple in one year.

Policy Institute	Grants ($m) 2018	Grants ($m) 2019
Australian Institute of International Affairs	0.06	0.06
Australian Institute of Policy and Science	na	0.04
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	22.04	na
Institute for Regional Security	0.10	0.18
Lowy Institute	na	2.00
Regional Australia Institute	1.32	0.24
SAGE International	na	0.50
Strategic and Defence Studies Centre	na	0.60
United States Studies Centre	na	0.80

Appendix K: Funding Source Methodology

This appendix provides further detail on the Chapter Five funding analysis. The funding analysis uses data from think tanks' 2018 annual reports (a small number of cases required alternative sources). It assesses funding across three different sources: privately generated income, government funding, and university sources. In aggregate, seventy-five institutes are substantially funded by a single source (forty-six are privately funded, fifteen are university-funded, and fourteen are government-funded). The analysis uses a 75 per cent threshold to categorise funding as single-source (that is, the think tank derives at least 75 per cent of its income from one source).

Institutes that receive between 50 and 75 per cent of their funding from one source, and the balance from another, are labelled with the majority funding source first followed by the minority source. So, for example, the Institute for Regional Security received between 50 and 75 per cent of its 2018 funding from government sources and the balance came from private sources. It is therefore classified as 'Govt, Private'.

This simple methodology allows for the classification of all institutes according to their two largest funding sources. All institutes received at least 50 per cent of funding from one source.

Appendix L: 'Think-and-Do-Tanks'

Centre for Policy Development

The Centre for Policy Development (CPD) places collaborative engagements at the centre of its activities. CPD does not just leverage its cognitive capacities; it immerses itself in issues. In 2016, CPD commissioned law firm MinterEllison to provide a legal opinion on directors' duties regarding climate risks. CPD's intention was not just to advance the debate; it was to settle the debate. The resultant legal opinion asserted that company directors 'could be held personally liable for breaching the duty of care and diligence they owe to their company' under the Corporations Act (CPD, 2016b). Upon establishing directors' potential liabilities, CPD conducted a series of roundtable discussions to highlight the opinion's implications. Subsequent CPD events saw high-profile speakers Geoff Summerhayes (Executive Board Member, Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority), John Price (Commissioner, Australian Securities and Investment Commission), Guy Debelle (Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of Australia), and The Honourable Kenneth Hayne QC, all ratify CPD's proposals (Summerhayes, 2017; Price, 2018; Debelle, 2019; Hayne, 2019).

Throughout this process, CPD's primary objective has been to engage and elicit responses from Australia's primary corporate regulators. CPD has been demonstrably successful in this regard. But it remains an ongoing focus to ensure company boards prioritise climate-related issues.

The Chief Executive Officer of CPD, Travers McLeod, has few doubts regarding CPD's impact on this issue: 'I think we have changed Australian law and motivated the regulatory responses from APRA, ASIC and the RBA – and I think that's definitely a causal win that we would claim' (interview with T. McLeod, 2019). The evidence supports McLeod's declaration. At a minimum, CPD has re-framed the debate surrounding directors' responsibilities. The legitimising involvement of authoritative public figures has enabled CPD to tangibly impact governance expectations and the corporate world's institutional operating environment – all without the need to activate politicians.

Beyond Zero Emissions

Beyond Zero Emissions (BZE) primarily produces in-depth, technical reports and targets them to an expert audience. The research champions sweeping reforms over an extended period, necessitating BZE's engagement throughout the entire policy cycle. That is, BZE seeks to clearly define issues through thick reports that are agenda-setting at their core. The reports contain explicit recommendations for policy action (policy formulation), and the institute directly promotes the content to commercial enterprises to encourage implementation (in addition to their policymaker-focussed efforts). BZE's '*Rethinking Cement*' report is an exemplar (Lord, 2017). In this report, BZE advances the case for zero-carbon cement, arguing that Australia can have a carbon-neutral industry within ten years. The institute frames traditional cement-making as an issue requiring urgent attention owing to the eight per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions caused by cement manufacturing (Lord, 2017, p. 77).

BZE developed a clear strategy to ensure the '*Rethinking Cement*' report gained immediate attention (interview with Petrie, 2019). The nature of the report meant that it was unlikely to appeal to a mass audience, and as such, there was no attempt to persuade the public of the report's merits. Nor was media attention actively pursued. Instead, BZE pursued decision-makers within industry. The Chief Executive Officer of BZE, Vanessa Petrie, explains:

> What we did was put a lot of time and effort into engaging and reaching out to people who were involved in making procurement decisions around cement. We spent a lot of time with the construction and infrastructure sector sharing our research and we, at the time, to be honest, were blown away by the interest […]. We are relatively small, so how do you get the best influence? I know that I could spend all of my time working exclusively with government, but that's not reflective of how decisions are made – [they're] made across the supply chain (interview with Petrie, 2019).[282]

BZE has had a discernible impact on industry practice via its collaborative activities (BZE, 2020). Specifically, BZE has collaborated with Australia's fourteenth-largest company (and one of the world's largest toll-road operators), Transurban Group, to 'develop a pathway to zero-carbon for their business' (interview with Petrie, 2019).[283] Transurban's Head of Sustainability, Matthew Brennan, notes his organisation's intentions to 'roll out some of the very practical strategies that BZE have identified for us' (BZE, 2019). Brennan states that he was 'inspired'

[282] Vanessa Petrie left her role at BZE in March 2020.
[283] Transurban Group was Australia's fourteenth-largest company by market capitalisation on August 31, 2021 (ASX, 2021).

by BZE's '*Rethinking Cement*' report and asserts that it had significantly impacted Transurban's emission-reduction ambitions (interview with Brennan, 2020).

Similar to CPD, BZE has had a definitively casual impact through its intellectual contributions. The institute astutely targets the business community to generate immediate impacts while, at the same time, promotes reform at the macro level by engaging government officials. These think-and-do-tanks are readily able to identify cause-and-effect relationships because they themselves act as 'triggers' or 'activators' of change – not necessarily at the macro policy level, but most certainly at the micro-level (van der Heijden et al., 2021).

Appendix M: Events

This appendix lists the forty-three events that this study attended either in-person or by live remote connection. The table's final column classifies each event according to the taxonomy discussed in Chapter Seven.

Entity	Event Title	City	Date	Category
Centre for Independent Studies	Do third parties really matter?	Sydney	12-Mar-19	Hybrid
RSA	Ideas for a more productive politics	Sydney	20-Mar-19	Philosophical
Lowy Institute	Stephen J. Hadley - NSA	Sydney	28-Mar-19	Informative
Centre for Independent Studies	40 years after Thatcher's election	Sydney	1-May-19	Philosophical
Lowy Institute	Kevin Rudd - On China	Sydney	13-Jun-19	Informative
Centre for Independent Studies	Corporate virtue signalling	Sydney	18-Jun-19	Policy
Grattan Institute	Hydrogen: coming to a stovetop near you?	Sydney	2-Jul-19	Policy
CEDA	The role of temporary migration	Sydney	23-Jul-19	Policy
Centre for Independent Studies / Per Capita	'The Pursuit' (movie + panel)	Sydney	24-Jul-19	Philosophical
Centre for Independent Studies	The rise and fall of the liberal international order	Sydney	6-Aug-19	Philosophical
CEDA	Priorities in value-based healthcare	Sydney	16-Aug-19	Policy
Grattan Institute	Choice between vocational and higher education	Melbourne	20-Aug-19	Policy
AIIA	Secret Trials: The illegal bugging of the Timor Cabinet	Canberra	27-Aug-19	Informative
Lowy Institute	Mapping aid and influence in the Pacific Islands	Sydney	19-Sep-19	Hybrid
United States Studies Centre	Mia Love on Trump, race and the future of the Republican Party	Sydney	21-Oct-19	Informative
United States Studies Centre	Marise Payne: Ensuring security, enabling prosperity	Sydney	29-Oct-19	Hybrid
Grattan Institute	Tackling Sydney's congestion	Sydney	19-Nov-19	Policy
Lowy Institute	An address on China by Tony Abbott	Sydney	28-Nov-19	Informative
Australia-China Relations Institute	US-China Tensions: How vulnerable is the Australian economy?	Sydney	28-Nov-19	Informative
Centre for Independent Studies	Howard and Alstom: Is there more to life than politics?	Sydney	5-Dec-19	Philosophical
Chifley Research Centre	Towards 2022: Ideas for Labor and Australia	Sydney	7-Dec-19	Policy
United States Studies Centre	Vision 2020: What to expect from the US this year	Sydney	30-Jan-20	Informative
Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies	Leadership and Policy Seminar Series - Rodd Staples	Sydney	13-Feb-20	Hybrid
Grattan Institute	Creating an expert teacher career path to improve teaching	Sydney	25-Feb-20	Policy
United States Studies Centre	Uncertain Future: US Foreign Policy	Sydney	5-Mar-20	Informative
United States Studies Centre	US and Australia responses to COVID-19	Webinar	31-Mar-20	Informative
Lowy Institute	Lowy Institute Live: US-China rivalry in the coronavirus era	Webinar	8-Apr-20	Informative
United States Studies Centre	Lessons Learned from the US Response to COVID-19	Webinar	14-Apr-20	Informative
Centre for Independent Studies	On Liberty Episode 3: Monica Wilkie	Webinar	16-Apr-20	Philosophical
Per Capita	Debt or Destitution: With Jim Chalmers	Webinar	22-Apr-20	Hybrid
CEDA	Artificial Intelligence as a force for good	Webinar	28-Apr-20	Informative
Chifley Research Centre	Un-Trumping America	Webinar	29-Apr-20	Philosophical
Fabians	Socialism and the Australian Progressive Movement	Webinar	29-Apr-20	Philosophical
United States Studies Centre	A conversation with John Berry	Webinar	1-May-20	Informative
The Australia Institute	The public health response with Professor Peter Doherty	Webinar	5-May-20	Hybrid
The Australia Institute	International responses to COVID-19 with Helen Clark	Webinar	13-May-20	Informative
The Australia Institute	The role of climate action after the pandemic with Zali Steggall	Webinar	20-May-20	Informative
Regional Australia Institute	Regions Rising: regional recovery - what are we learning?	Webinar	27-May-20	Hybrid
Lowy Institute	In conversation with Carl Bildt	Webinar	27-May-20	Informative
Per Capita	Jobs for Australia: A new call for full employment	Webinar	29-May-20	Policy
McKell Institute	Aviation in Australia after Covid-19	Webinar	2-Jun-20	Policy
Centre for Independent Studies	Is Capitalism in Crisis?	Webinar	5-Jun-20	Philosophical
PerthUSAsia	US politics (in collaboration with USSC)	Webinar	12-Jun-20	Informative

Appendix N: Revolving Doors

Revolving? Or Just Swinging?

The revolving door describes circumstances where public officials transfer from roles within government to the private sector (think tanks, in the present case) and subsequently resume roles within government. This rotation purportedly fosters greater diversity in idea generation and facilitates knowledge production.

Few Australian scholars have examined the revolving door phenomenon. Cahill (2004) identified a revolving door between the Australian Liberal Party and 'neo-liberal activist groups' and detailed a list of participating individuals (Cahill, 2013, extends his original analysis). Halpin and Warhurst (2016) focused their analysis on Australia's commercial lobbying industry and found that 31 per cent of individuals on Australia's lobbyist register held prior government roles. The Grattan Institute (2018c, p. 22) produced similar results in its extensive study on political influence (see also Robertson et al., 2019). The present study finds that the revolving door is a noteworthy feature of the Australian think tank industry. It might not be dynamic or prominent – and it might swing rather than revolve – but it does represent an additional avenue to influence for some think tanks.

This study used the LinkedIn professional networking platform to identify think tank employees' occupational histories. This examination first collected employee names (including research fellows) from the websites of the identified think tank population. LinkedIn searches uncovered the employment histories for the vast majority of these employees (a small number of cases required alternative searches).[284] Table N.1 details the search results.

Table N.1

	Sample Entities	Identified Individuals	Government Experience	Percentage
Policy Institute Employees	71	517	147	28%
Policy Institute Research Fellows	32	277	118	43%

[284] This search was performed between December 14, 2019, and January 15, 2020. The results exclude think tank employees with unidentifiable work histories. The analysis includes think tanks' administrative employees as many of these possess relevant governmental experience and several have PhD qualifications, suggesting they might also play ideational roles. Some university-affiliated institutes include dozens (hundreds) of faculty members, and they are therefore excluded from this sample. The analysis also excludes government-affiliated entities due to the difficulty in identifying individual employees.

The analysis reveals that 28 per cent of think tank employees (in this sample) and 43 per cent of think tank research fellows have prior government experience.[285] But it is important to highlight that this analysis does not assess whether a door is revolving: it simply addresses the one-way flow from government to think tanks. That is, this initial analysis shows that a door does indeed swing, but does not necessarily revolve. This flow of government employees to think tanks is no surprise. The vast majority of think tanks openly covet policy influence, so employing individuals with government connections might develop access avenues that facilitate influence.

Some Australian think tank executives question the existence of a revolving door. Rory Medcalf from the National Security College suggests that 'one of the reasons why [the exchange of employees] doesn't happen very often is that typically, people don't get career advancement – and they don't get job security' (interview, 2019). Similarly, ASPI's Peter Jennings laments that 'there's not a larger group of public servants that want this type of experience. I just think it does reflect the fact that we have a different system to the Americans and that revolving door doesn't really operate here' (interview, 2019). It is worth noting that both Medcalf and Jennings are former government bureaucrats (indeed, Jennings was the Deputy Secretary for Strategy in the Defence Department). It is also interesting that Medcalf's NSC embraces programs similar to those previously advanced by scholar Ian Marsh. Marsh (1980) asserted that the Australian government should facilitate 'exchange arrangements' between the government bureaucracy and public policy institutes to help augment policymaking capacities. Forty years on, the NSC has (at least) four senior-level bureaucrats employed on secondment from a range of government departments, thereby creating a revolving door-type phenomenon.[286]

It is relatively straightforward to identify individuals who have shifted from government to think tanks, but more difficult to do so in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, there are some high-profile examples (in addition to those discussed in Chapter Seven). The present Director-General of the Office of National Intelligence, Andrew Shearer, revolved from government, to the Lowy Institute, and back to senior government roles (McDonald, 2020; Morrison, 2020). And Liberal Party MP Julian Leeser revolved from government, to the

[285] Research fellows are typically unpaid representatives and produce content on an occasional basis. Thirty-two think tanks list research fellows on their websites.
[286] An NSC website search identified these senior-level secondees on January 15, 2020.

Executive Director role at the Menzies Research Centre, and back to government (Leeser, 2021). These cases might be relatively isolated, but they do provide some evidence for the revolving door phenomenon in Australia. While full rotations might not be common, moves in at least one direction regularly occur – a 'swinging door' perhaps. These circumstances present an opportunity for future research.

Appendix O: Think Tank Political Access

This appendix details think tanks' meetings with state government ministers. The tables first detail meetings with ministers from New South Wales, followed by Queensland and the ACT.

NSW Minister Meetings

Count	Year	Minister	Date	Entity
1	2015	Premier - Minister for Infrastructure	10-Feb	InfraPartners Australia
2	2015	Minister for the Environment and Heritage	19-Jan	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
3	2015	Minister for the Environment and Heritage	28-Jan	Global Access Partners
4	2015	Minister for the Environment and Heritage	6-Feb	Beyond Zero Emissions
5	2015	Treasurer, Minister for IR	22-May	InfraPartners Australia
6	2015	Treasurer, Minister for IR	25-May	InfraPartners Australia
7	2015	Minister for Family and Community Services	11-May	InfraPartners Australia
8	2015	Minister for Planning	27-Apr	Committee for Sydney
9	2015	Minister for Planning	21-May	The Australia Institute
10	2015	Minister for the Environment and Heritage	19-May	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
11	2015	Minister for Transport and Infrastructure	9-Apr	InfraPartners Australia
12	2015	Premier - Minister for Infrastructure	20-Aug	InfraPartners Australia
13	2015	Treasurer, Minister for IR	1-Jul	InfraPartners Australia
14	2015	Treasurer, Minister for IR	30-Jul	InfraPartners Australia
15	2015	Minister for Family and Community Services	25-Aug	InfraPartners Australia
16	2015	Minister for Health	6-Aug	Grattan Institute
17	2015	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	6-Aug	United States Studies Centre
18	2015	Minister for Planning	28-Jul	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
19	2015	Minister for Trade, Tourism, Major Events, Sport	6-Jul	Committee for Sydney
20	2015	Minister for Trade, Tourism, Major Events, Sport	28-Sep	Committee for Sydney
21	2015	Minister for Transport and Infrastructure	16-Jul	Committee for Sydney
22	2015	Treasurer, Minister for IR	3-Dec	United States Studies Centre
23	2015	Treasurer, Minister for IR	8-Dec	McKell Institute
24	2015	Minister for Education	30-Nov	Grattan Institute
25	2015	Minister for Education	3-Dec	Grattan Institute
26	2015	Minister for Family and Community Services	4-Nov	Committee for Sydney
27	2015	Minister for Family and Community Services	15-Dec	InfraPartners Australia
28	2015	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	3-Dec	Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering
29	2015	Minister for Trade, Tourism, Major Events, Sport	16-Dec	Committee for Sydney
30	2016	Treasurer, Minister for IR	29-Feb	Sydney Institute
31	2016	Minister for Planning	11-Feb	InfraPartners Australia
32	2016	Minister for the Environment and Heritage	16-Feb	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
33	2016	Minister for Trade, Tourism, Major Events, Sport	2-Feb	Committee for Sydney
34	2016	Premier - Minister for Infrastructure	27-Apr	InfraPartners Australia
35	2016	Treasurer, Minister for IR	22-Apr	InfraPartners Australia
36	2016	Treasurer, Minister for IR	25-May	InfraPartners Australia
37	2016	Treasurer, Minister for IR	27-May	Committee for Sydney
38	2016	Minister for Finance, Services and Property	29-Jun	The CIS
39	2016	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	12-Apr	Committee for Sydney
40	2016	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	9-May	Committee for Sydney
41	2016	Minister for Mental Health	7-Apr	McKell Institute
42	2016	Minister for Planning	12-May	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
43	2016	Minister for Planning	27-Jun	Committee for Sydney
44	2016	Minister for Trade, Tourism, Major Events, Sport	6-Jun	Committee for Sydney
45	2016	Minister for Trade, Tourism, Major Events, Sport	29-Jun	ASPI
46	2016	Minister for Trade, Tourism, Major Events, Sport	29-Jun	Lowy
47	2016	Minister for Trade, Tourism, Major Events, Sport	29-Jun	Menzies
48	2016	Treasurer, Minister for IR	6-Sep	InfraPartners Australia
49	2016	Attorney General	27-Jul	Sydney Institute
50	2016	Minister for Family and Community Services	17-Aug	InfraPartners Australia

51	2016	Minister for Finance, Services and Property	1-Sep	McKell Institute
52	2016	Minister for Industry, Resources and Energy	28-Jul	Grattan Institute
53	2016	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	18-Jul	Institute of Public Affairs
54	2016	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	7-Sep	The CIS
55	2016	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	7-Sep	The CIS
56	2016	Minister for Planning	5-Jul	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
57	2016	Minister for Planning	25-Jul	McKell Institute
58	2016	Minister for Planning	7-Sep	CEDA
59	2016	Minister for Planning	19-Sep	InfraPartners Australia
60	2016	Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight	20-Jul	InfraPartners Australia
61	2016	Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight	23-Sep	InfraPartners Australia
62	2016	Minister for Transport and Infrastructure	29-Sep	InfraPartners Australia
63	2016	Premier, Minister for Western Sydney	13-Oct	InfraPartners Australia
64	2016	Treasurer, Minister for IR	25-Oct	InfraPartners Australia
65	2016	Treasurer, Minister for IR	21-Nov	InfraPartners Australia
66	2016	Minister for Corrections, Emergency Services, Veterans Affairs	17-Nov	Institute of Public Affairs
67	2016	Minister for Corrections, Emergency Services, Veterans Affairs	1-Dec	InfraPartners Australia
68	2016	Minister for the Environment and Heritage	10-Nov	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
69	2016	Minister for Family and Community Services	10-Nov	Committee for Sydney
70	2016	Minister for Finance, Services and Property	6-Oct	InfraPartners Australia
71	2016	Minister for Health	13-Oct	Grattan Institute
72	2016	Minister for Planning	25-Nov	CEDA
73	2016	Minister for Transport and Infrastructure	17-Oct	InfraPartners Australia
74	2016	Minister for Transport and Infrastructure	1-Dec	Committee for Sydney
75	2017	Minister for Family and Community Services	14-Feb	InfraPartners Australia
76	2017	Minister for Finance, Services and Property	14-Mar	InfraPartners Australia
77	2017	Minister for Health, Medical Research	10-Feb	Committee for Sydney
78	2017	Minister for Resources, Energy and Utilities	10-Mar	InfraPartners Australia
79	2017	Minister for Western Sydney, WestConnex, Sport	27-Mar	Committee for Sydney
80	2017	Treasurer, Minister for IR	20-Apr	InfraPartners Australia
81	2017	Minister for Resources, Energy and Utilities	15-May	Grattan Institute
82	2017	Minister for Family and Community Services	26-Sep	InfraPartners Australia
83	2017	Minister for Counter Terrorism, Corrections, Veteran Affairs	10-Aug	ASPI
84	2017	Minister for Education	26-Jul	The CIS
85	2017	Minister for Finance, Services and Property	15-Aug	The CIS
86	2017	Minister for Health, Medical Research	7-Jul	Committee for Sydney
87	2017	Minister for Health, Medical Research	25-Aug	Grattan Institute
88	2017	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	27-Sep	Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering
89	2017	Minister for Multiculturalism, Disability Services	9-Aug	Global Access Partners
90	2017	Minister for Resources, Energy and Utilities	27-Sep	InfraPartners Australia
91	2017	Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight	10-Aug	Grattan Institute
92	2017	Minister for Transport and Infrastructure	6-Sep	Committee for Sydney
93	2017	Minister for Western Sydney, WestConnex, Sport	6-Jul	InfraPartners Australia
94	2017	Minister for Western Sydney, WestConnex, Sport	6-Jul	InfraPartners Australia
95	2017	Minister for Western Sydney, WestConnex, Sport	31-Aug	Committee for Sydney
96	2017	Premier	24-Nov	Lowy
97	2017	Treasurer, Minister for IR	29-Nov	McKell Institute
98	2017	Minister for Family and Community Services	10-Oct	InfraPartners Australia
99	2017	Minister for Family and Community Services	6-Dec	InfraPartners Australia
100	2017	Minister for Education	5-Dec	The CIS

101	2017	Minister for Education	21-Dec	Institute of Economics and Peace
102	2017	Minister for Education	21-Dec	Grattan Institute
103	2017	Minister for Finance, Services and Property	16-Oct	InfraPartners Australia
104	2017	Minister for Health, Medical Research	30-Oct	Grattan Institute
105	2017	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	9-Oct	InfraPartners Australia
106	2017	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	8-Nov	CEDA
107	2017	Minister for Mental Health	5-Dec	Global Access Partners
108	2018	Premier	17-Jan	InfraPartners Australia
109	2018	Premier	5-Feb	ASPI
110	2018	Treasurer, Minister for IR	22-Mar	InfraPartners Australia
111	2018	Minister for Counter Terrorism, Corrections, Veteran Affairs	26-Feb	ASPI
112	2018	Minister for Finance, Services and Property	16-Mar	The CIS
113	2018	Minister for Health, Medical Research	21-Feb	McKell Institute
114	2018	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	20-Feb	Committee for Sydney
115	2018	Minister for Counter Terrorism, Corrections, Veteran Affairs	19-Apr	ASPI
116	2018	Minister for Counter Terrorism, Corrections, Veteran Affairs	23-Apr	ASPI
117	2018	Minister for Police, Emergency Services	4-Apr	ASPI
118	2018	Minister for Transport and Infrastructure	18-Apr	InfraPartners Australia
119	2018	Premier	6-Aug	Committee for Sydney
120	2018	Minister for Education	27-Sep	Committee for Sydney
121	2018	Minister for Family and Community Services	2-Aug	Australian Human Rights Commission
122	2018	Minister for Family and Community Services	19-Sep	AHURI
123	2018	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	24-Jul	Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering
124	2018	Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation	6-Aug	Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering
125	2018	Treasurer, Minister for IR	14-Nov	InfraPartners Australia
126	2018	Minister for Counter Terrorism, Corrections, Veteran Affairs	27-Nov	ASPI
127	2019	Treasurer, Minister for IR	29-Jan	McKell Institute
128	2019	Minister for Customer Service	13-May	Committee for Sydney
129	2019	Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism, Western Sydney	20-May	Committee for Sydney
130	2019	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces	24-Apr	Global Access Partners
131	2019	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces	1-May	Committee for Sydney
132	2019	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces	14-May	Committee for Sydney
133	2019	Treasurer	5-Jul	Institute of Public Affairs
134	2019	Treasurer	25-Jul	Committee for Sydney
135	2019	Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning	30-Jul	Page Research Centre
136	2019	Minister for Health, Medical Research	2-Aug	Australian Human Rights Commission
137	2019	Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism, Western Sydney	27-Aug	Committee for Sydney
138	2019	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces	21-Aug	Committee for Sydney
139	2019	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces	16-Sep	Committee for Sydney
140	2019	Minister for Transport and Roads	2-Jul	Committee for Sydney
141	2019	Minister for Transport and Roads	8-Jul	InfraPartners Australia
142	2019	Minister for Water, Property and Housing	20-Aug	Committee for Sydney
143	2019	Treasurer	8-Oct	Committee for Sydney
144	2019	Treasurer	25-Oct	Institute of Public Affairs
145	2019	Treasurer	30-Oct	Committee for Sydney
146	2019	Treasurer	7-Nov	Committee for Sydney
147	2019	Deputy Premier	11-Nov	InfraPartners Australia
148	2019	Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism, Western Sydney	13-Nov	Committee for Sydney
149	2019	Minister for Transport and Roads	19-Nov	InfraPartners Australia

Queensland Minister Meetings

Count	Year	Minister	Date	Entity
1	2015	Treasurer; Minister for Education and IR	17-Feb	CEDA
2	2015	Minister for Environment; National Parks	19-Feb	TJ Ryan
3	2015	Minister for Environment; National Parks	29-Apr	Climate Institute
4	2015	Treasurer; Minister for Education and IR	18-May	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
5	2015	Treasurer; Minister for Education and IR	19-May	Infra Partnerships Australia
6	2015	Premier	1-Jun	TJ Ryan
7	2015	Minister for Health	21-Jul	CEDA
8	2015	Minister for Environment; National Parks	23-Jul	CEDA
9	2015	Treasurer; Minister for Education and IR	3-Aug	Fabians
10	2015	Deputy Premier	6-Aug	CEDA
11	2015	Treasurer; Minister for Education and IR	19-Aug	Grattan Institute
12	2015	Minister for Housing and Public Works; Science	2-Sep	AIIA
13	2015	Minister for Tourism; Education	3-Sep	Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists
14	2015	Minister for Main Roads; Safety	22-Sep	CEDA
15	2015	Treasurer; Minister for Education and IR	1-Oct	Productivity Commission
16	2015	Minister for Environment; National Parks	20-Oct	CEDA
17	2015	Minister for Housing and Public Works; Science	26-Nov	CEDA
18	2016	Treasurer; Minister for Education and IR	16-Feb	TJ Ryan
19	2016	Minister for Tourism; Education	3-Mar	CEDA
20	2016	Deputy Premier; Minister for Infra, Planning	22-Mar	Grattan Institute
21	2016	Minister for Employment; IR	12-Apr	CEDA
22	2016	Minister for Environment; National Parks	14-Apr	BZE
23	2016	Deputy Premier; Minister for Infra, Planning	26-Apr	The Australia Institute
24	2016	Minister for Health	10-May	Grattan Institute
25	2016	Treasurer; Minister for Education and IR	20-Jun	CEDA
26	2016	Minister for Environment; National Parks	20-Jun	CEDA
27	2016	Deputy Premier; Minister for Infra, Planning	4-Aug	CEDA
28	2016	Minister for Energy; Biofuels	12-Aug	BZE
29	2016	Deputy Premier; Minister for Infra, Planning	9-Sep	McKell Institute
30	2016	Minister for Innovation, Small Business	27-Sep	TJ Ryan
31	2016	Premier	29-Sep	CEDA
32	2016	Minister for Tourism; Education	10-Nov	Grattan Institute
33	2016	Minister for Energy; Biofuels	24-Nov	Grattan Institute
34	2016	Minister for Environment; National Parks	6-Dec	The Australia Institute
35	2016	Minister for Transport	6-Dec	Infra Partnerships Australia
36	2016	Minister for Transport	6-Dec	Infra Partnerships Australia
37	2017	Minister for Health	26-Apr	CEDA
38	2017	Minister for Innovation, Small Business	11-Aug	AIPS
39	2017	Premier	20-Sep	CEDA
40	2017	Deputy Premier	4-Oct	Infra Partnerships Australia

41	2018	Deputy Premier	5-Feb	Productivity Commission
42	2018	Deputy Premier	8-Feb	Infra Partnerships Australia
43	2018	Minister for Environment; Science	20-Mar	ANU Climate Change Institute
44	2018	Minister for Environment; Science	9-May	CEDA
45	2018	Minister for Transport	10-May	Infra Partnerships Australia
46	2018	Deputy Premier	18-Jun	CEDA
47	2018	Minister for Employment; Small Business; Training	22-Jun	Mitchell Institute
48	2018	Minister for Transport	3-Jul	CEDA
49	2018	Minister for Health	4-Jul	Grattan Institute
50	2018	Minister for Agricultural Industry Development	12-Jul	CEDA
51	2018	Deputy Premier	31-Jul	Infra Partnerships Australia
52	2018	Premier	7-Aug	McKell Institute
53	2018	Minister for State Development, Infra	8-Aug	Infra Partnerships Australia
54	2018	Premier	12-Sep	CEDA
55	2018	Minister for Transport	10-Oct	McKell Institute
56	2018	Minister for Environment; Science	21-Nov	McKell Institute
57	2019	Minister for Employment; Small Business; Training	31-Jan	CPD
58	2019	Minister for Multicultural Affairs	29-Mar	AHRC
59	2019	Minister for Employment; Small Business; Training	5-Apr	CEDA
60	2019	Deputy Premier	11-Apr	Australian Climate Council
61	2019	Premier	7-Jun	CEDA
62	2019	Minister for Housing and Public Works; Science	17-Jun	CEDA
63	2019	Minister for Innovation, Tourism	29-Aug	McKell Institute
64	2019	Minister for State Development, Infra	9-Oct	Regional Australia Institute
65	2019	Premier	30-Oct	CEDA
66	2019	Minister for Justice	21-Nov	AHRC
67	2019	Minister for Employment; Small Business; Training	5-Dec	McKell Institute

ACT Minister Meetings

Count	Year	Minister	Date	Entity
1	2018	Chief Minister	24-May	InfraPartners Australia
2	2018	Chief Minister	27-Jun	InfraPartners Australia
3	2018	Chief Minister	3-Aug	InfraPartners Australia
4	2018	Attorney General	13-Jun	ASPI
5	2018	Minister for Climate Change +	1-May	The Australia Institute
6	2018	Minister for Climate Change +	4-Oct	Human Rights Commission
7	2018	Minister for Housing +	29-May	AHURI
8	2018	Minister for Housing +	27-Nov	AHURI
9	2019	Chief Minister	21-Jun	InfraPartners Australia
10	2019	Minister for Health +	4-Dec	Grattan
11	2019	Minister for Climate Change +	30-May	Human Rights Commission
12	2019	Minister for Climate Change +	2-Oct	Human Rights Commission

Appendix P: Think Tank Social Media Presence

This appendix details the fastest-growing think tanks on the Twitter and Facebook social media platforms. The first table shows the aggregate increase in 'followers' and 'likes' across the two platforms on a year-on-year basis. This appendix uses data collected on April 30, 2019, and April 29, 2020.

Entity	YoY Change
Institute for Economics and Peace	51526
Climate Council	21673
The Australia Institute	14893
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	8175
Lowy Institute	7111
Freedom for Faith	5513
Australian Human Rights Commission	4837
Grattan Institute	3991
Institute of Public Affairs	3760
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	3200

The next table shows the year-on-year increase in the number of followers per week on Twitter. The Australia Institute, for example, had 52.5 followers per week (total followers divided by the number of weeks on-platform) in 2019 which then grew to 62.2 in 2020. Therefore, The Australia Institute is growing its follower base at an increasing rate (9.7 from 2019 to 2020).

Entity	YoY Change
The Australia Institute	9.7
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	7.5
Australia Defence Association	3.6
Climate Change Institute	3.4
Centre for Future Work	2.8
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	2.5
Climate Council	2.4
The Centre for Independent Studies	2.1
Grattan Institute	2.0
Institute of Public Affairs	2.0

The final table shows the year-on-year increase in the number of likes per week on Facebook. In this example, The Australia Institute had 75.6 likes per week in 2019 and grew that to 82.2 in 2020. Therefore, The Australia Institute increased its likes per week by 6.6 year-on-year.

Entity	YoY Change
Institute for Economics and Peace	61.0
Freedom for Faith	12.3
The Australia Institute	6.6
Climate Change Institute	2.5
Green Institute	1.0
Centre for Future Work	1.0
Grattan Institute	0.7
Griffith Asia Institute	0.7
Per Capita	0.6
Institute for Civil Society	0.3

Appendix Q: Think Tank Podcasts

This appendix details the two-hundred-and-fourteen podcasts that inform the analysis in Chapter Seven. Additional notes (not presented here) have been taken on all of these podcasts, including observations on the content, style, and salience.

Count	Listen Date	Entity	Title	Topic	Length (mins)
1	03-Jun-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	The New Normal - The Future of US-China relations	32
2	17-Jun-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	The Terrorist's Wife: The Role of Women and Children in Jihad	33
3	24-Jun-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	The Propaganda Department - Media, censorship and politics in China	34
4	28-Aug-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	Australia's great and powerful friends	31
5	30-Aug-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	The Octagon of Power - Unpacking the Asian Power Index	33
6	01-Sep-19	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	Brexit	22
7	01-Sep-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	Has Disney Won The Trade War?	64
8	02-Sep-19	SAGE	Strategikon	American Power in Asia - Permanency in Abeyance?	71
9	04-Sep-19	InfraPA	Inside Infrastructure	Scott Charlton - Transurban CEO	54
10	05-Sep-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Economic Warfare and the Globalisation of innovation	47
11	06-Sep-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Battlefield singularity, AI pixie dust, and the future of war	41
12	07-Sep-19	CIS	The CIS	Amanda Stoker: The Future of Liberalism	52
13	09-Sep-19	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	Australia's fuel security, Darwin port, Enough Project & India	47
14	09-Sep-19	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Filling the gap: A universal dental care scheme for Australia	24
15	09-Sep-19	CIS	The CIS	Australia's choice in a US-China conflict	39
16	09-Sep-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Fintech and the geopolitics of crypto-currencies	34
17	11-Sep-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	Who doesn't have access to your metadata now?	67
18	11-Sep-19	SAGE	Strategikon	European Coup - Back to a Balance of Power Europe?	61
19	12-Sep-19	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	Directors Cut: War in 2025 conference special	16
20	12-Sep-19	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	The Cost of Defence, the ANU data breach & perspectives from India	42
21	18-Sep-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	National security and the media in Southeast Asia	50
22	19-Sep-19	CIS	The CIS	The banking sector after Hayne	50
23	20-Sep-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	The Centre-Right is Alive and Well	57
24	20-Sep-19	Grattan	Grattan Institute	How to attract high achievers to teaching in Australia	28
25	23-Sep-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Hugh White on how to defend Australia	72
26	25-Sep-19	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	The Christchurch terror attack; and 'The North'	41
27	25-Sep-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	Hong Kong: Nobody Puts Freedom in the Corner	59
28	26-Sep-19	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	US Defence Budget and Indo-Pacific, Australia in Hormuz	32
29	26-Sep-19	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Age War? Talking about the generational bargain	79
30	26-Sep-19	PerthUSAsia	Perspectives	Nukes in our Backyard? Indo-Pacific Nuclear Security	23
31	28-Sep-19	Whitlam Institute	Whitlam Institute Podcast	Q&A at The Scribe	56
32	28-Sep-19	AIIA	AIIA	John West: Asian Century...on a knife edge	62
33	28-Sep-19	PerthUSAsia	Perspectives	US-Australia and a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (Walter Douglas)	15
34	29-Sep-19	UTS:ACRI	The ACRI Podcast	Nationalism and the People's Republic of China - with Rowan Callick	57
35	29-Sep-19	AIIA	Australia in the World	The rules-based international order with Allen Gyngell	33
36	09-Oct-19	PerthUSAsia	Perspectives	Doomsday Clock: Two Minutes to Midnight	31
37	09-Oct-19	PerthUSAsia	Perspectives	What is a Think Tank? The Power to Influence Policy	31
38	14-Oct-19	UTS:ACRI	The ACRI Podcast	Australia and the BRI	37
39	14-Oct-19	InfraPA	Inside Infrastructure	Graham Bradley Part 1	41
40	15-Oct-19	Whitlam Institute	Whitlam Institute Podcast	Opening Event - Spy: Espionage in Australia	53
41	15-Oct-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	Socialist Paradise: The new North Korea under Kim Jong-Un	33
42	16-Oct-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	In the middle of the Indo-Pacific: Japan, SE Asia and Pacific Islands	78
43	16-Oct-19	UTS:ACRI	The ACRI Podcast	Japan-China relations and the implications for Australia	31
44	17-Oct-19	Whitlam Institute	Whitlam Institute Podcast	Dedicated to the Dedicated: Opening Night	51
45	17-Oct-19	AIIA	AIIA	Beyond Trump	83
46	18-Oct-19	CIS	The CIS	China debate: John Mearsheimer and Hugh White	86
47	18-Oct-19	DevPolicy	DevPolicy Centre Podcast	Australian aid: building a robust performance culture	44
48	18-Oct-19	AIIA	AIIA	Rethinking Global Governance	51
49	18-Oct-19	DevPolicy	DevPolicy Centre Podcast	Navigation by judgement: why and when top down management	61
50	19-Oct-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Kelly Magsamen on US National Security Policy	41

50	19-Oct-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Kelly Magsamen on US National Security Policy	41
51	19-Oct-19	InfraPA	Inside Infrastructure	Susan Anderson - on her Uber rating, the future of mobility	29
52	21-Oct-19	AIIA	Australia in the World	PM Morrison visits the Trump White House	44
53	22-Oct-19	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 126 with Tim Wilson	64
54	23-Oct-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	Kremlinology: What does Russia want?	33
55	23-Oct-19	SAGE	Strategikon	Reiwa Era Japan	37
56	25-Oct-19	USSC	2020 Vision	The Squad	28
57	26-Oct-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	Belt and Road - The Next Phase	32
58	26-Oct-19	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Why it's time for congestion charging in Australia	21
59	26-Oct-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	Agent of Instability: Trump's America	34
60	26-Oct-19	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	Morrison goes to Washington	30
61	28-Oct-19	CIS	The CIS	Boris Johnson and British Conservatism	63
62	29-Oct-19	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 131 with Amanda Stoker	59
63	29-Oct-19	AIIA	Australia in the World	The Australia-China Relationship	35
64	29-Oct-19	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Right time, right place: a practical plan for congestion charging	22
65	29-Oct-19	InfraPA	Inside Infrastructure	Rodd Staples - on his rise to NSW Transport Secretary	66
66	02-Nov-19	AIIA	AIIA SA	Dr Axel Lorenz - Thermonuclear Fusion	81
67	02-Nov-19	UTS:ACRI	The ACRI Podcast	Cybersecurity: Developments in the PRC	21
68	05-Nov-19	PerthUSAsia	Perspectives	Launch of the Asia Power Index - Lowy Institute	92
69	06-Nov-19	SAGE	Strategikon	The Power and the Oil	58
70	08-Nov-19	AIIA	Australia in the World	Debating PM Morrison's Lowy Speech	27
71	11-Nov-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	Who's Afraid of the Nation State?	73
72	11-Nov-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Right-wing extremism and domestic terror (part two)	42
73	13-Nov-19	Fabians	Progressive Ideas Worth Shari	Levelling the Democratic Playing Field	38
74	16-Nov-19	TAI	Follow The Money	What The Hell Is Dividend Imputation?	22
75	16-Nov-19	TAI	Follow The Money	Climate and the Pacific with Former President Anote Tong	24
76	16-Nov-19	TAI	Follow The Money	See What You Made Me DO with Jess Hill	38
77	16-Nov-19	AFI	AFI 2019 Roundtable	Episode 1: Mick Keogh	29
78	16-Nov-19	AFI	AFI 2019 Roundtable	Episode 3: Dr John Hewson	13
79	16-Nov-19	AFI	AFI 2019 Roundtable	Episode 9: Dr Stuart Whitten	12
80	16-Nov-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	Episode 43: Is Tony Abbott Our Biggest National Security Threat?	65
81	18-Nov-19	AIIA	Australia in the World	Episode 33: US leadership: vision vs reality	40
82	18-Nov-19	USSC	2020 Vision	A White House at war with the media	31
83	19-Nov-19	AIIA	AIIA WA	Australian Soft Power (and soft thinking)	58
84	19-Nov-19	Fabians	Progressive Ideas Worth Shari	John Keane - Is Democracy Dying?	56
85	20-Nov-19	AIIA	AIIA WA	Defending the Maritime Rules-Based Order	72
86	25-Nov-19	Fabians	Progressive Ideas Worth Shari	Dr Jim Stanford: The Many Faces of Privatisation	64
87	26-Nov-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	Episode 44: What's Next As Chian Slams Door on Liberal MPs?	65
88	27-Nov-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	Globalisation's Next Wave: The Jobs Apocalypse	33
89	27-Nov-19	USSC	2020 Vision	Could the US-China trade deal save or sink Trump?	20
90	28-Nov-19	SAGE	Strategikon	Short-sighted or short-changed?	48
91	28-Nov-19	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 135 with Bridget Phetasy and Dave Sharma	70
92	28-Nov-19	CIS	The CIS	What lessons should we have learnt from the GFC?	30
93	28-Nov-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	Episode 45: Westpac - Woke Capitalism and the compliance state	65
94	28-Nov-19	CIS	The CIS	Daniel Pipes: Antisemitism, Islam and leftists	34
95	30-Nov-19	DevPolicy	DevPolicy Centre Podcast	Men's perspectives on addressing family and sexual violence in PNG	70
96	30-Nov-19	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Saving private health: reigning in hospital costs	22
97	30-Nov-19	TAI	Follow The Money	The Wages Crisis	25
98	30-Nov-19	Fabians	Progressive Ideas Worth Shari	2019 Federal Election Analysis	62
99	30-Nov-19	Whitlam Institute	Whitlam Institute Podcast	Human Rights + Technology: A community consultation with the AHRC	76
100	01-Dec-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Techlosophy and the future of security	46
101	03-Dec-19	TAI	Follow The Money	How Good is the Economy?	33
102	03-Dec-19	TAI	Follow The Money	What's Going On With the Murray Darling Basin?	62
103	03-Dec-19	AFI	AFI 2019 Roundtable	Dr. Annette Cowie, IPCC Report Co-Author	27
104	03-Dec-19	InfraPA	Inside Infrastructure	Jon Lamonte - in how he went from the RAF to building trains	54
105	09-Dec-19	CIS	The CIS	Democracy is thin? Claire Fox on Brexit	38
106	09-Dec-19	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Saving private health 2: Making private health insurance viable	24
107	10-Dec-19	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	The Beersheba Dialogue	40
108	10-Dec-19	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	Renting influence: China in the Pacific	35
109	11-Dec-19	CIS	The CIS	Is Hungary a free country?	19
110	12-Dec-19	AIIA	Australia in the World	Episode 34: All things China (again)!	45

111	12-Dec-19	DevPolicy	DevPolicy Centre Podcast	Development the Aga Khan way	40
112	12-Dec-19	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 138: Should Pill Testing be Legal	58
113	12-Dec-19	AIIA	AIIA WA	Crisis in Yemen	67
114	13-Dec-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Impeachment, foreign policy, and national security	57
115	14-Dec-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	Episode 46: Are we haunted by Turnbull's ghost?	66
116	15-Dec-19	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Prime Minister's Summer Reading List 2019	73
117	15-Dec-19	CIS	The CIS	Waking up to the China Challenge	70
118	15-Dec-19	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Can private health insurance be saved from the jaws of death?	68
119	16-Dec-19	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 139: Mikhaila Peterson	59
120	16-Dec-19	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	China's challenge to US primacy	32
121	16-Dec-19	TAI	Follow The Money	The People vs Tech	64
122	16-Dec-19	CIS	The CIS	The 2019 CIS Nanny Awards	18
123	20-Dec-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	IPAs Great Books For The Summer Break Part 1	72
124	20-Dec-19	NSC	National Security Podcast	Freedom of the press and the year that was 2019	43
125	31-Dec-19	IPA	The Looking Forward Podcast	IPAs Great Books For The Summer Break Part 2	68
126	16-Jan-20	Lowy	Rules Based Audio	Exporting Digital Authoritarianism	32
127	16-Jan-20	InfraPA	Inside Infrastructure	Tim Nelson - on his early career and energy policy	73
128	16-Jan-20	UTS:ACRI	The ACRI Podcast	Australia-China artificial intelligence research collaboration	17
129	16-Jan-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	Episode 35: Ex-ASIO head Duncan Lewis (Part 1)	46
130	16-Jan-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	Episode 36: Ex-ASIO head Duncan Lewis (Part 2)	50
131	16-Jan-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	BZE speaks to Matthew Brennan - Transurban	28
132	19-Jan-20	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 140: Brendan O'Neill and Grunt the Pig decides hero of year	45
133	19-Jan-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	BZE speaks to Alan Pears AM	28
134	19-Jan-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	BZE speaks to Prof Tom Kompas	28
135	19-Jan-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	BZE speaks to Dr Dominique Hes	28
136	19-Jan-20	SAGE	Strategikon	Target: Soleimani	29
137	19-Jan-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	The bushfires, internationally; the Soleimani killing	42
138	24-Jan-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	BZE speaks to Dr Adrian Panow	28
139	30-Jan-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	Episode 38: Gordon de Brouwer	41
140	30-Jan-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	BZE speaks to Grant Chorvat	28
141	31-Jan-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	BZE speaks to Vanessa Petrie	26
142	31-Jan-20	newDemo	Facilitating Public Deliberation	Ep. 1: Citizens' Juries with Ned Crosby	32
143	05-Feb-20	newDemo	Facilitating Public Deliberation	Ep. 2: Planning Cells	40
144	05-Feb-20	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	Fires in the sky and the ground	45
145	07-Feb-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	BZE speaks to Maddy John on BZEs impact assessment	28
146	11-Feb-20	newDemo	Facilitating Public Deliberation	Ep. 3: The history of deliberative mini-public with John Gatsil	32
147	11-Feb-20	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 141: Bushfires, Megxit	53
148	13-Feb-20	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Could the bushfire crisis be the turning point for climate policy?	32
149	13-Feb-20	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 142: Australians don’t want to change the date	51
150	17-Feb-20	SAGE	Strategikon	Boris' Brexit Breakthrough	44
151	17-Feb-20	newDemo	Facilitating Public Deliberation	Ep. 4: Lars Kluver	37
152	18-Feb-20	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Top teachers: sharing expertise to improve teaching	33
153	25-Feb-20	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Do increases in superannuation come out of wages?	19
154	25-Feb-20	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Ep. 145: Andrew Bolt…	73
155	25-Feb-20	McKell	Rekindling Hope	Welcome!	16
156	25-Feb-20	McKell	Rekindling Hope	Big Questions	37
157	26-Feb-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	Coronavirus; Huawei; WTO	38
158	27-Feb-20	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	The threat of a China-Russia partnership	25
159	27-Feb-20	InfraPA	Inside Infrastructure	Amy Brown	75
160	28-Feb-20	Whitlam Institute	Whitlam Institute Podcast	The Golden Country	82
161	29-Feb-20	SAGE	Strategikon	2020 Raisina Dialogue	54
162	02-Mar-20	NSC	National Security Podcast	Populism and Australia's future in Asia	55
163	02-Mar-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	Ep. 39: The 2020 Raisina Dialogue	34
164	04-Mar-20	McKell	Rekindling Hope	Yes We Can (Rekindle Hope)	49
165	07-Mar-20	NSC	National Security Podcast	Ask Policy Forum	63
166	11-Mar-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	Ep. 41: Richard Maude	49
167	11-Mar-20	Grattan	Grattan Institute	How coronavirus is affecting the Australian economy	29
168	13-Mar-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	Ep. 42: Covid-19 update; ASIO speaks	40
169	14-Mar-20	McKell	Rekindling Hope	Rekindling-gate	44
170	16-Mar-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	Suncable	28

171	20-Mar-20	NSC	National Security Podcast	Rory Medcalf on the contest for the Indo-Pacific	60
172	30-Mar-20	CIS	The CIS	China: The New Pandemic	76
173	30-Mar-20	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Coronavirus and Australia's healthcare system	24
174	10-Apr-20	AIIA	AIIA WA	Back from the Barracks: Why Indonesia's Military Still Reigns Supreme	70
175	10-Apr-20	InfraPA	Inside Infrastructure	Bernard Tabary	61
176	10-Apr-20	SAGE	Strategikon	Indo-Pacific II: Thoughts and Observations	42
177	11-Apr-20	TAI	Follow The Money	The complete reshaping of Australia's economy with Wayne Swan	54
178	11-Apr-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	Episode 44: The United States and the alliance	45
179	13-Apr-20	TAI	Follow The Money	No trust without scrutiny - the case for an epidemic response committee	13
180	13-Apr-20	NSC	National Security Podcast	Disinformation - from climate change to Covid-19	52
181	13-Apr-20	InfraPA	Inside Infrastructure	Tony Shepherd - on Covid-19 and infrastructure stimulus	53
182	13-Apr-20	newDemo	Facilitating Public Deliberation	Episode 10 - Deliberative processes with Matthew Taylor (RSA)	28
183	13-Apr-20	ACRI	The ACRI Podcast	Covid 19: Supply chain risks	28
184	27-Apr-20	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	Afghanistan Peace Efforts	41
185	27-Apr-20	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	Australia's next steps	30
186	27-Apr-20	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Shutdown: estimating the COVID-19 employment shock	31
187	03-May-20	AIIA	AIIA WA	The politics of pandemics: COVID-19 and the international order	58
188	03-May-20	DevPolicy	DevPolicy Talks	2020 Australasian AID Conference	53
189	09-May-20	TAI	Follow The Money	Media in Crisis	59
190	09-May-20	AIIA	Australia in the World	Episode 45: The WHO; 'mask diplomacy'; DFAT	32
191	09-May-20	TAI	Follow The Money	Covid-19 and rethinking national security	27
192	09-May-20	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 155: Adam Creighton	65
193	11-May-20	McKell	Rekindling Hope	Self Isolation Tips with Astronaut Andy Thomas	23
194	11-May-20	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Episode 157: Dave Rubin	65
195	25-May-20	SAGE	Strategikon	The Collapsed Oil price	49
196	25-May-20	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	Weaponised deep fakes	33
197	25-May-20	IPA	Young IPA Podcast	Ep. 164: So COVIDSafe Doesn’t Even Work?	47
198	30-May-20	TAI	Follow The Money	Black holes and Keynesians	33
199	30-May-20	Fabians	Progressive Ideas Worth Shari	In conversation with Andrew Leigh	58
200	30-May-20	NSC	National Security Podcast	American national security and the 202 election	47
201	30-May-20	CIS	The CIS	Has China Won? Mahbubani Vs Mearsheimer	59
202	31-May-20	Grattan	Grattan Institute	Fast train fever	31
203	31-May-20	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	The US-China relationship	40
204	31-May-20	UTS:ACRI	The ACRI Podcast	COVID-19: US-China war of words	33
205	09-Jun-20	NSC	National Security Podcast	Indonesia and COVID-19	60
206	09-Jun-20	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	Maritime and Space Update	33
207	22-Jun-20	BZE	Beyond Zero - Science and Sol	BZE speaks to Bryce Caton	28
208	22-Jun-20	Sydney Institute	The Sydney Institute	High Court of Australia and the Release of the Palace Letters	61
209	22-Jun-20	NSC	National Security Podcast	Foreign investment and national security	37
210	06-Jul-20	Prosper Australia	Renegade Economist	Big Pharma Plays the Pandemic	33
211	06-Jul-20	Prosper Australia	Renegade Economist	Life after interest rates with Josh Ryan-Collins	36
212	06-Jul-20	Prosper Australia	Renegade Economist	Justice before Liberty, ok!	25
213	06-Jul-20	Sydney Institute	The Sydney Institute	The US after the death of George Floyd: Overflowing Anger versus Voices of Hope	60
214	27-Jul-20	ASPI	Policy, Guns and Money	National security agencies and the cloud	25

Appendix R: Think Tank Videos

This appendix details the fifty videos that inform the corresponding analysis in Chapter Seven. Additional notes have been taken on all videos, including observations on the content, style, and salience.

Count	Listen Date	Event Date	Entity	Title	Topic	Length (mins)
1	31-Dec-19	26-Nov-19	CEDA	The Global War on Plastic	Andrew Forrest + Q&A	43
2	02-Jan-20	20-Nov-19	AIP	Campus Meltdown Book Launch	William Coleman's speech	35
3	02-Jan-20	26-Sep-19	CEDA	Company Pulse Research Release QLD	Andrew Stevens address (Chair - Innovation and Science Australia)	18
4	08-Jan-20	26-Sep-19	CEDA	Company Pulse Research Release QLD	Melinda Cilento presentation	21
5	08-Jan-20	10-Dec-18	CEDA	Health and Human Services	Melinda Cilento presentation	23
6	08-Jan-20	28-Oct-19	CEDA	The Economists Corner: Ep. 1	Episode 1	11
7	27-Jan-20	23-Jul-19	SDSC	The Pacific Step-Up	Will it work and what happens if not?	93
8	27-Jan-20	07-Jun-19	SDSC	Pacific Geopolitics Workshop	Keynote: Ewen McDonald	54
9	27-Jan-20	05-Mar-18	SDSC	Transition Point	Embracing the 4th Age of War	34
10	30-Jul-20	18-May-20	AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology	AIC Occasional Seminar Series 2020: Live streaming child sex abuse	40
11	30-Jul-20	06-May-20	AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology	AIC Occasional Seminar Series 2020: Homicide in Australia	32
12	30-Jul-20	14-Jul-20	AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology	Prevalence of domestic violence among women during COVID-19 pandemic	16
13	30-Jul-20	22-Feb-18	Climate Council	The Climate Council	Kidston Solar Project	2
14	30-Jul-20	03-May-18	Climate Council	The Climate Council	Parkes is the king of renewables	2
15	30-Jul-20	21-May-20	Climate Council	The Climate Council	Primed for action: a resilient recovery for Australia	2
16	31-Jul-20	15-Jun-15	AHRC	AHRC	Magna Carta - the story of our freedom	4
17	31-Jul-20	03-Jul-20	AHRC	AHRC	Freedom of Religion in Australia	59
18	31-Jul-20	11-Jun-13	AHRC	AHRC	What you say matters. It stops with me. Brothablack.	4
19	05-Aug-20	15-Dec-17	Mannkal	Mannkal	Dr Jennifer Oriel: The Great Unlearning (Part of the 'sun rises in the West')	27
20	05-Aug-20	02-Apr-20	Mannkal	Mannkal	Mannkal's Emerging Leaders 2020	44
21	07-Aug-20	22-Feb-11	Mannkal	Mannkal	The Sun Rises in the West - Prof Barry Marshall	15
22	07-Aug-20	16-Apr-20	Samuel Griffith Society	Samuel Griffith Society	Peter Dunning QC	29
23	07-Aug-20	26-Dec-20	Samuel Griffith Society	Samuel Griffith Society	Susan Kiefel AC - Chief Justice of High Court	29
24	07-Aug-20	26-Apr-17	newDemocracy	newDemocracy	What is a Citizen's Jury?	4
25	11-Aug-20	01-Aug-19	Ngara Institute	Ngara Institute	An evening with John Pilger	100
26	11-Aug-20	05-Aug-16	Ngara Institute	Ngara Institute	Politics in the Pub - Neoliberalism and the new culture of narcissism	46
27	13-Aug-20	26-Jan-20	ALRC	Australian Law Reform Commission	Future of Law Reform	41
28	13-Aug-20	03-Sep-19	AHURI	AHURI	National Housing Conference 2019 Darwin Slideshow	3
29	13-Aug-20	15-Apr-16	AHURI	AHURI	Hon Brad Hazzard MP AHURI Conference Opening Address	31
30	13-Aug-20	31-Mar-16	IPA	IPA	Mark Steyn - Speech at IPA Gala Dinner	41
31	13-Aug-20	24-Dec-19	IPA	IPA	What I wasn't told about Donald Trump	3
32	17-Aug-20	14-May-14	IPA	IPA	Roger Scruton: Liberty and Democracy in Western Civilisation	38
33	17-Aug-20	13-Aug-20	IPA	IPA	The IPA with you - episode 1	8
34	17-Aug-20	23-Apr-20	IPA	IPA	John Roskam joins Andrew Bolt for whiskey with a mate	7
35	01-Sep-20	08-Jul-20	The Australia Institute	TAI	Richard Denniss on COVID-19 recession	4
36	01-Sep-20	06-Nov-19	The Australia Institute	TAI	Protect the laws that protect us	1
37	01-Sep-20	23-Apr-19	The Australia Institute	TAI	Watergate: Scandal surrounding Murray Darling basin buybacks	10
38	01-Sep-20	30-Apr-20	The Australia Institute	TAI	Inequality in a pandemic: Joseph Stiglitz	61
39	06-Sep-20	16-Apr-20	The Australia Institute	TAI	Ben Oquist: Sky News Political Panel	8
40	06-Sep-20	26-Jun-20	Global CCS Institute	Global CCS Institute	About Us	4
41	06-Sep-20	20-May-20	Global CCS Institute	Global CCS Institute	CCS Talks: The European Green Deal	49
42	08-Sep-20	30-Sep-19	Australian Fabians	Fabians	The Surveillance State in Australia	52
43	08-Sep-20	27-Aug-19	Australian Fabians	Fabians	John Keane - is democracy dying?	56
44	10-Sep-20	17-Apr-20	Menzies Research Centre	Menzies	Watercooler Live 2	73
45	10-Sep-20	04-Jul-20	Menzies Research Centre	Menzies	Watercooler Live 12	64
46	11-Sep-20	26-Aug-20	Australian Fabians	Fabians	Privatisation in the Australian Health System	24
47	12-Sep-20	19-May-20	The Australia Institute	TAI	The Australian Government Health Response: Health Minister Greg Hunt	48
48	29-Sep-20	28-Jul-20	RAI	Regions Rising Webinar Series	Regional Renaissance: Can we lead the recovery?	64
49	29-Sep-20	18-May-20	RAI	Regional Australia Institute	COVID-19 and Regional Australia	16
50	29-Sep-20	31-Aug-20	RAI	Regions Rising Webinar Series	A healthy approach to economic recovery	62

Appendix S: Employment Histories

This appendix details think tank staff members' employment histories. Data collection for this categorisation occurred between December 14, 2019, and January 15, 2020. Think tank websites permitted the identification of individual employees, and LinkedIn facilitated the identification of employment histories (along with other websites in a small number of cases). Each entity's employee count includes 'administrative' staff but excludes board members and members of research advisory committees. The tables also exclude government-affiliated entities and some university-affiliated entities. The details contained within the tables are time-dependent. For example, The Australia Institute stopped identifying its staff members (away from its three-person executive team) on its website in the first half of 2018 but recommenced doing so in 2021.[287] As such, only three The Australia Institute employees appear on this list. The term 'experience' means the identified employee was formally employed in the designated field. The tables also identify those think tank employees with PhDs (or in the final year of their PhD studies). The first table details think tank employees, while the second table references think tank fellows.

[287] The *WayBack Machine* internet archive helped to identify The Australia Institute's publication of its staff members.

Think tank employees (1)

Entity	Identifiable Employees	Gov't Experience	Media Experience	Academic Experience	PhD Qualified
Australia 21	1	0	0	0	0
Australia China Relations Institute	6	1	1	2	1
Australia Defence Association	1	0	0	0	0
Australian Environment Foundation	1	0	0	1	1
Australian Fabians	10	1	0	1	2
Australian Farm Institute	6	0	1	1	1
Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute	15	4	0	6	5
Australian Institute for Progress	3	1	0	0	0
Australian Institute of Employment Rights	2	1	0	0	0
Australian Institute of International Affairs	3	0	0	1	1
Australian Institute of Policy and Science	3	1	1	2	1
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	50	22	7	8	9
Beyond Zero Emissions	6	3	0	1	1
Centre for Applied Economic Research	1	0	0	1	1
Centre for Future Work	2	0	0	1	1
Centre for Policy Development	8	3	1	3	3
Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research	3	1	0	1	1
Chifley Research Centre	2	2	0	0	0
China Matters	8	0	0	0	2
Climate Council	3	0	0	1	2
Committee for Adelaide	1	1	1	0	0
Committee for Economic Development of Australia	10	6	1	0	0
Committee for Melbourne	13	4	0	0	0
Committee for Perth	6	0	0	0	0
Ethos EA Centre for Christianity and Society	4	0	0	4	3
Evatt Foundation	14	11	0	4	5
Freedom for Faith	1	0	0	0	0
Future Directions International	1	1	0	0	0
Global Access Partners	10	3	3	0	0
Grattan Institute	22	12	1	0	4
Green Institute	2	1	1	0	0
HR Nicholls Society	1	1	0	0	0
Indonesia Institute	3	2	0	1	1
Indonesia Project	7	0	0	2	2
Infrastructure Partnerships Australia	4	2	0	0	0

Think tank employees (2)

Institute for Civil Society	4	2		3	3
Institute for Economics and Peace	4	0	0	1	1
Institute for Private Enterprise	1	1	0	0	0
Institute for Regional Security	1	1	0	0	0
Institute of Public Affairs	17	6	1	0	0
International Water Centre	26	5	0	13	12
John Curtin Research Centre	1	1	0	1	1
Lowy Institute	24	5	2	1	1
Mannkal Economic Education Foundation	7	0	0	1	0
McKell Institute	6	3	0	0	0
Menzies Research Centre	4	2	2	0	0
Mitchell Institute	8	2	1	6	6
National Security College	31	7	1	24	9
newDemocracy	2	0	0	0	0
Per Capita	5	1	1	1	0
Perth USAsia Centre	12	1	1	1	2
PM Glynn Institute	4	1		1	3
Policy Cures Research	13	2	1	1	4
Prosper Australia Research Institute	4	1	0	0	0
Regional Australia Institute	2	1	0	0	1
RSA ANZ	2	1	0	1	1
SAGE International Australia	4	1	0	4	3
South Australian Centre for Economic Studies	7	1	0	6	1
The Australia Institute	3	3	1	1	1
The Australian APEC Study Centre	12	2	0	2	2
The Centre for Independent Studies	11	1	2	1	0
The Committee for Sydney	9	1	1	0	0
The Global CCS Institute	17	2		1	4
The Page Research Centre	1	0	0	0	0
The Sir Richard Williams Foundation	0	0	0	0	0
The Sydney Institute	2	1	1	1	1
The Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering	4	0	0	0	1
TJ Ryan Foundation	3	2	0	3	3
United States Studies Centre	24	2	2	12	10
Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists	1	1	0	1	1
Whitlam Institute	8	3	0	1	0
TOTAL	**517**	**147**	**35**	**129**	**118**
PERCENTAGE	**na**	**28%**	**7%**	**25%**	**23%**

Think tank fellows

Entity	Identifiable Fellows	Gov't Experience	Media Experience	Academic Experience	PhD Qualified
Australia 21	10	1	0	4	7
Australia China Relations Institute	1	0	0	1	1
Australian Farm Institute	9	1	1	2	3
Australian Institute for Progress	1	0	0	0	0
Australian Strategic Policy Institute	22	12	2	5	7
Centre for Policy Development	25	13	4	12	12
Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research	13	0	0	11	12
Chifley Research Centre	0	0	0	0	0
Committee for Perth	2	0	0	0	0
Ethos EA Centre for Christianity and Society	1	0	0	1	1
Evatt Foundation	14	11	0	5	4
Future Directions International	15	3	2	12	13
Grattan Institute	4	4	0	1	1
Indonesia Project	3	0	0	3	3
Institute for Economics and Peace	3	0	0	0	0
Institute of Public Affairs	10	4	1	2	5
Lowy Institute	36	23	8	12	16
McKell Institute	11	7	0	0	0
Menzies Research Centre	1	0	0	1	1
Mitchell Institute	9	3	0	3	3
National Security College	1	0	0	1	1
Per Capita	7	6	1	2	2
Perth USAsia Centre	14	6	0	11	8
Regional Australia Institute	8	2	0	6	8
SAGE International Australia	3	1	0	0	3
South Australian Centre for Economic Studies	9	1	0	9	7
The Australian APEC Study Centre	3	0	0	2	2
The Centre for Independent Studies	16	8	2	9	5
The Page Research Centre	0	0	0	0	0
The Sir Richard Williams Foundation	3	2	0	2	2
United States Studies Centre	14	8	3	5	5
Whitlam Institute	9	2	0	7	7
TOTAL	**277**	**118**	**24**	**129**	**139**
PERCENTAGE	**na**	**43%**	**9%**	**47%**	**50%**

Appendix T: Think Tank Comparative Metrics

Chapter Five calculates several metrics to compare think tank industry size across the Anglosphere. This appendix provides further detail on the raw data used to calculate the measures in Table 5.2.

The calculations use data from the December quarter of 2019. The GDP data is commonly based in USD to allow for cross-country comparisons, while the government employee data is for all government employees (across local, state/provincial, and federal governments). The table below presents the raw data used in the calculations, and repeats Table 5.2 for reference.

	Australia	USA	UK	Canada
2019 Populations (World Bank) - million	25.4	328.3	66.8	37.6
2019 GDP (World Bank) - USD trillion	1.4	21.4	2.8	1.7
2019 Government employees - million	2.1	22.5	5.4	3.9

	Australia	USA	UK	Canada
Number of think tanks	93	1871	321	100
Head of population per think tank ('000)	273	175	208	376
Government employees per think tank ('000)	23	12	17	39
GDP per think tank ($bn)	15	11	9	17

Appendix U: Ethics Approval Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Research Integrity & Ethics Administration
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 30 April 2019

Assoc Prof Anika Gauja
Government & International Rel; Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Email: anika.gauja@sydney.edu.au

Dear Anika,

The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has considered your application.

I am pleased to inform you that after consideration of your response, your project has been approved.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Project No.:	**2019/249**
Project Title:	**To what extent do think tanks influence policymaking in Australia?**
Authorised Personnel:	**Gauja Anika; Hagland Trent;**
Approval Period:	**30 April 2019 – 30 April 2023**
First Annual Report Due:	**30 April 2020**

Documents Approved:

Date	Type	Document
29/04/2019	Safety Protocol	Safety protocol
26/04/2019	Participant Info Statement	PIS Strand One - Politicians version 2 - Clean
26/04/2019	Participant Info Statement	PIS Strand One - Media version 2 - Clean
26/04/2019	Participant Info Statement	PIS Strand One - Think Tanks version 2 - Clean
26/04/2019	Participant Info Statement	PIS Strand Two version 2 - Clean
23/04/2019	Questionnaires/Surveys	Survey - Media version 2 Clean
23/04/2019	Questionnaires/Surveys	Survey - Politicians version 2 Clean
23/04/2019	Questionnaires/Surveys	Survey - Think Tanks version 2 Clean
23/04/2019	Recruitment Letter/Email	Participant Invitation Email for Strand Two
27/03/2019	Recruitment Letter/Email	Participant Invitation Email (S1)
18/03/2019	Participant Consent Form	PCF Interviews
18/03/2019	Questionnaires/Surveys	Survey - Think Tanks
18/03/2019	Questionnaires/Surveys	Survey - Politicians
18/03/2019	Questionnaires/Surveys	Survey - Media
18/03/2019	Interview Questions	Interview Questions / Themes - All

Special Condition/s of Approval

1. It is a condition of approval that a modification is submitted and approved by the Modifications Review Committee before Strand 3 commences. The modification should contain confirmation of which participants you will recruit and how they will be contacted, a copy of the interview questions, finalised PISs, and letters of support from the case study think tanks.

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CRICOS 00026A

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Condition/s of Approval

- Research must be conducted according to the approved proposal.
- An annual progress report must be submitted to the Ethics Office on or before the anniversary of approval and on completion of the project.
- You must report as soon as practicable anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project including:
  - Serious or unexpected adverse events (which should be reported within 72 hours).
  - Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- Any changes to the proposal must be approved prior to their implementation (except where an amendment is undertaken to eliminate *immediate* risk to participants).
- Personnel working on this project must be sufficiently qualified by education, training and experience for their role, or adequately supervised. Changes to personnel must be reported and approved.
- Personnel must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation, as relevant to this project.
- Data and primary materials must be retained and stored in accordance with the relevant legislation and University guidelines.
- Ethics approval is dependent upon ongoing compliance of the research with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, applicable legal requirements, and with University policies, procedures and governance requirements.
- The Ethics Office may conduct audits on approved projects.
- The Chief Investigator has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research and is responsible for ensuring all others involved will conduct the research in accordance with the above.

This letter constitutes ethical approval only.

Please contact the Ethics Office should you require further information or clarification.

Sincerely,

Jen Scott Curwood

Associate Professor Jennifer Scott Curwood
Chair
Humanities Review Committee (Low Risk)

The University of Sydney of Sydney HRECs are constituted and operate in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) and the NHMRC's Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007)

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