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We See Thee Rise: Canada's Emerging Role In Policy Leadership

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In their 2010 book [The Canadian Century: Moving Out of America's Shadow](#), Brian Lee Crowley, Jason Clemens, and Niels Veldhuis, three leading Canadian policy and think tank experts, described the great opportunity lying ahead for our northern neighbor. Public policy reforms that increased market incentives, opened new areas to trade and production, and moved toward increased economic freedom and financial stability, reversed the trends that made Canada lag behind the U.S. Canada today ranks ahead of the United States in economic freedom and in transparency, as well as in many other economic indicators such as lower levels of debt, less unemployment, and higher GDP growth.

Think Tanks in Canada have been developing policy analyses and advocating market oriented solutions for decades. Some of the oldest think tanks and advocacy groups, such as the [C.D. Howe Institute](#), founded in 1958, and the [National Citizens Coalition](#), NCC, founded in 1974, are still active. The idea for NCC developed from the success of newspaper advertorials.

The first one published by Colin M. Brown in 1967 pointed out that despite not being engaged in the Vietnam War, Canada's federal government spending in the early 1960's rose at a faster rate than government spending in the U.S.

Canadian civil society took notice and reacted. The [Fraser Institute](#) was founded in Vancouver, B.C. in 1974, and its success and generosity in sharing its expertise led to a gradual but almost steady investment in think tanks across the country. Lest we forget, Canada is a big place. It is the second largest country in the world.

The longest distance from east to west is 5,514 km – similar to the distance from New York City to London, or from New York City to Lima, Peru. Canada has six separate time zones and its provinces have considerable cultural and political diversity which call for a multiplicity of regional think tanks and policy efforts.

The "[2012 Global Go To Report](#)" devotes a section of its think tank rankings to institutes in Canada and Mexico. A growing number of Canadian free-market think tanks are appearing among the top.

Fraser Institute takes the lead. It received more mentions (10) than any other Canadian think tank and ranked first in Canada and 25th in the world. It is well known for its motto: "If It Matters, Measure It." Many of its products, like the "Tax Freedom Day" and its economic freedom indices, have been

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replicated across the globe. Think tanks all over the world look at Fraser's research as a guide in developing their own programs.

Brian Lee Crowley, the co-author of *The Canadian Century*, founded the Ottawa-based [Macdonald Laurier Institute](#) in 2010. It ranked third in the world in the category of best young institute. As it hit the ground running with great policy products, it also managed to rank ahead of other older think tanks, including the [Atlantic Institute for Market Studies \(AIMS\)](#) in Nova Scotia, founded in 1994. Crowley was also the founding president of AIMS. AIMS itself an organization that produces interesting work on market reforms in Canada's maritime provinces – a part of the country that typically prefers big government as opposed to market-oriented solutions.

[The Montreal Economic Institute](#) deserves special mention for working in one of the most challenging cultural environments. It publishes in French and English, and is the only think tank in Canada to focus its efforts entirely on Quebec. The institute was founded in 1985 but became consolidated when Michel Kelly-Gagnon, a talented intellectual entrepreneur, became its leader in 1999 and restructured the organization. Kelly-Gagnon's expertise is in high demand also outside Canada, and his team has produced tremendous materials advocating specifically for reforms to government-controlled health care.

[The Frontier Centre for Public Policy](#), founded in 1999, has a wide range of think tank products. With offices in Winnipeg, Regina and Calgary its mission is "to develop and popularize policy choices that will help Canada's prairie region live up to its vast but unrealized economic potential."

Canada also has legal advocacy think tanks that defend victims of government abuse. [The Canadian Constitution Foundation](#), founded in 2005, and the [Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms](#), founded in 2011, both in Calgary, Alberta, are committed to the principles of the free society.

Only a handful of groups, both young, such as the [Mises Institute](#) Canada, founded in Toronto in 2010, and the Canadian chapter of [Students for Liberty](#), advocate for radical libertarian ideas. Most policy proposals coming from the more established market oriented think tanks focus on practical reforms which move policy towards a freer economy. Canadian think tank leaders tend to be much more libertarian than the culture in which they operate. Aware of this difference, they focus on the effectiveness of a proposal more than on conformity with an ideology.

The pioneering advocacy work of the National Citizens Coalition is complemented by the efforts of the [Canadian Taxpayers Federation](#) (CTF). Founded in 1990, the CTF advocates for lower and simpler taxes, less government waste, and more accountability in government. With communications staff in regional offices across the country, the CTF is the most media savvy organization in Canada and has the largest communications presence of all the free market organizations in Canada.

The [Manning Center](#), founded in 2005 by former Canadian politician and opposition leader Preston Manning, has more of a political image and orientation. It focuses on training and fostering leadership in the broad conservative and free market movement in Canada – as well as municipal government reform and tracking political opinions across the country.

Although they are less focused on free-markets, the Canadian think tank world includes centers focusing on defense. The [Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs institute](#), founded in 2001, covers this field. The [Conference of Defence Association Institute](#) conducts research on issues of national security and defense and provides valuable networking services and news. Given Canadian history, traditions of civility, and considerable independence, Canadian defense experts and diplomats can have global impact in areas where U.S. can be shunned or feared.

The three major differences between the pro-free enterprise Canadian and U.S. think tank market are its size, funding structure, and the diversity in the product line.

The total income of think tanks producing research and advocacy favorable to free enterprise in Canada is approximately 26 million. Fraser Institute is roughly one-third of the market. Whereas estimates of the [U.S. pro-freedom think tank market](#) is at least \$500 million. Given that the U.S. economy is ten times larger and the population is nine times that of Canada, in relative terms the U.S. market is almost twice the size of the Canadian.

Regarding the funding structure, think tanks in Canada receive a larger percentage of their income from corporations, usually over 30%, while their peers in the U.S. receive just over 10%. Individuals are the biggest source of income in U.S. think tanks, especially the larger ones, closely followed by foundations. Foundations play a key role in the Canadian think tank market, as much as they did in helping seed the U.S. market.

The market for ideas in the U.S. includes think tanks such as the Acton Institute, focusing on religion and liberty, and the older Ethics and Public Policy Research Center. **Canada still lacks strong think tanks in these areas, although the [Institute for Marriage and Family](#) has played a strong role in advocating for family rights.** Also lacking is the competition from “mission oriented” universities that are committed to promote the free society. Grove City College in Pennsylvania, Hillsdale College in Michigan, Universidad Francisco Marroquin, in Guatemala, and others in the Americas, create a healthy collaborative and competitive environment with think tanks in their regions.

Given the different nature of the products and services offered by these centers, it is hard to find common measurements applicable to all. Social media impact, with all its imperfection, gives us some idea. Fraser Institute is the leader in Twitter followers. With over 12,500, it has four times more followers than other market oriented competitors, and also beats the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a leftist think tank, which has 10,500 followers.

It is always hard to demonstrate the influence of think tanks. For some it would suffice to show that Stephen Harper, the current Prime Minister, was president of the National Citizens Coalition from 1998 to 2002. Similarly, Jason Kenney – a key minister in the Conservative government – was the early president of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) in the 1990’s, before entering politics. There are also countless examples of policies and reforms that began in the boardrooms and halls of Canada’s think tanks and have made their way into Canadian legislation. One example is the pension reform efforts led by the [CTF](#), which launched a national campaign calling for Members of Parliament to match

their pension contributions dollar for dollar with taxpayers. A few months later, the government announced its pension-reform – a piece of legislation that mirrored the policy put forth by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

The history of Canadian free-market think tanks and their contribution to Canadian reforms continues to be written. The leaders, supporters, and staff of the groups mentioned above deserve much credit for changing the economic face of Canada and of North America.

Anaïs Clement, research assistant, and Candice Malcolm, former fellow, of the Atlas Network, contributed to this piece.