

Forbes

The 2019 Ranking Of Free-Market Think Tanks Measured By Social Media Impact

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April 10, 2019

The most comprehensive ranking of think tanks is produced by the [Think Tanks and Civil Society Program](#) at the University of Pennsylvania. It includes tables with think tanks' standing in social media and their use of the Internet. The ranking is based on votes by peers and not on the actual outcomes, but in many cases rankings and outcomes go hand in hand. I share in this piece how think tanks and other organizations that promote a free economy scored during the March 2018-2019 period on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, SimilarWeb, LinkedIn and Instagram.

A [recent Wall Street Journal/NBC news](#) survey showed a majority of respondents believed that social media is dividing America, making us waste time, and helping spread more lies and falsehoods than actual, verifiable information. Nevertheless, think tanks, like many of us, spend a considerable amount of resources to communicate the results of their work and influence public policy through all types of social media.

	Twitter	Twitter	Facebook	Facebook	YouTube	YouTube	SimilarWeb	SimilarWeb	Alexa	Alexa
List of think tanks	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019
US Based Free-Market Think Tanks										
Heritage Foundation	630,000	640,000	2,088,840	2,062,435	32,744	43,312	2,920,000	2,740,000	21,810	23,716
Cato Institute	337,000	354,000	381,560	376,493	35,268	39,356	956,210	1,350,000	46,287	40,105
AEI	107,000	112,000	305,327	301,544	142,118	163,102	1,080,000	800,330	46,659	59,089
Action Institute	20,600	21,300	812,381	795,445	5,820	6,936	213,900	277,650	206,666	228,760
Mises USA	89,100	101,000	232,919	234,905	63,845	76,566	1,570,000	1,480,000	28,703	27,817
Foundation for Economic Education (FEE)	28,100	35,000	121,581	141,794	22,196	85,525	1,530,000	1,660,000	37,673	31,091
Foreign										
CEPR (Venezuela)	96,000	107,000	10,254	11,360	2,153	2,644	n/a	n/a	1,158,177	1,643,072
Mises Brazil	6,730	21,800	276,420	287,530	22,859	43,552	837,220	1,310,000	107,612	79,422
Fundacion para el Progreso (Chile)	22,000	n/a	n/a	134,052	16,701	37,826	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,418,683
Fraser Institute (Canada)	25,000	27,600	23,890	25,952	n/a	n/a	289,360	335,480	149,639	149,891
CIDAC (Mexico)	46,100	46,400	83,085	82,115	3,188	3,361	n/a	n/a	1,189,200	991,337
CEP (Chile)	58,900	61,600	12,713	27,100	2,522	3,711	61,900	88,250	737,329	388,557
ILISP (Brasil)	24,400	61,600	262,758	276,949	n/a	5,193	362,110	490,130	142,482	331,718
Adam Smith Institute (UK)	39,000	47,300	54,680	54,420	4,463	5,136	245,210	137,340	261,299	291,873
Libertad y Desarrollo (Chile)	36,600	38,700	9,038	9,645	473	578	n/a	n/a	1,051,090	949,626
Fundacion Libertad y Progreso (Argentina)	16,300	21,700	25,543	28,483	26,239	37,590	n/a	52990	1,264,322	762,491
Istituto Bruno Leoni (Italy)	21,600	24,100	15,824	17,039	1,072	1,345	n/a	n/a	615,610	1,012,961
IMANI (Ghana)	6,324	11,200	36,704	38,188	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,748,102
Advocacy Groups										
Freedom Works	283,000	282,000	4,953,202	4,937,703	12,000	11,921	112,430	245,280	451,546	273,339
Americans for Prosperity	130,000	106,000	1,105,608	1,093,600	7,002	7,199	105,960	n/a	742,652	732,226
University Based										
Hoover Institution (Stanford U)	96,700	102,000	325,967	341,043	74,763	112,847	439,270	551,470	90,389	82,567
Mercatus (GMU)	27,800	29,800	36,724	37,059	9,496	10,913	208,700	268,810	157,083	152,038
UFM (Guatemala)	6,871	7,449	107,730	111,380	9,903	13,120	351,060	352,550	118,724	116,237
Student Outreach										
Turning Point	105,000	226,000	856,623	1,274,291	8,529	74,343	73,660	133,280	360,292	286,073
Young Americans for Liberty	49,800	51,400	622,679	675,804	2,615	2,750	250,590	n/a	353,015	726,325
Young America's Foundation	46,800	71,100	66,035	351,843	41,151	101,598	205,080	98,260	247,933	231,720
Students for Liberty	33,500	38,200	139,193	140,779	2,431	3,085	154,950	122,660	448,392	332,114
Magazines and Media Focused efforts										
Prager U	114,000	205,000	2,801,120	3,224,524	1,287,579	2,006,102	1,430,000	1,170,000	58,816	61,625
Media Research Center	157,000	156,000	1,792,983	1,848,020	41,434	71,975	252,140	503,000	12,341	260,509
National Review (Magazine)	283,000	318,000	1,076,032	1,068,833	11,021	12,838	11,540,000	12,090,000	6,243	7,940
Reason	215,000	229,000	444,262	462,960	297,652	413,642	4,660,000	5,730,000	14,190	13,921
Daily Signal	54,100	61,600	808,160	869,602	8,651	19,383	2,710,000	2,940,000	37,342	42,005
Learn Liberty	41,300	40,900	292,668	285,883	161,118	180,602	192,900	66,830	306,310	556,989
PanamPost	37,400	58,900	349,234	363,673	5,604	7,205	1,190,000	734,500	23,270	42,627
Competition										
MoveOn.org	293,000	334,000	1,524,495	1,641,639	45,607	46,126	2,460,000	1,440,000	21,004	62,220
Brookings	324,000	358,000	393,679	407,952	46,242	69,295	2,600,000	3,000,000	13,570	12,659
Chatham House	166,000	186,000	85,443	95,002	12,192	69,041	361,450	381,760	71,296	94,766

Free-Market Think Tank Social Media Rankings. Data collected 2-25-2019/3-5-2019

The Heritage Foundation continues to rank first among free-market groups in Facebook and Twitter followers. It is also first in Web traffic. Heritage ranks ahead of Brookings in all social media platforms with the exception of LinkedIn, which is used more for networking than for education or dissemination. Chatham House, “England’s Brookings,” also scores well on LinkedIn. The American Enterprise Institute leads in YouTube subscribers, while the Foundation for Economic Education had the video with most minutes viewed during the last year.

In “visual social media” such as YouTube and Instagram, when we go beyond think tanks and include the efforts of other disseminators of ideas, PragerU is the undisputed leader.

Among foreign groups, several South American think tanks ranked extraordinarily well. The Instituto Mises, in Brazil, appeared in first or second position in five of the categories listed below. Two Chilean think tanks, the Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP), founded in 1980, and the much younger Fundación Para el Progreso (FPP), founded in 2012, appear in top positions in several categories. In my article on think-tank rankings last year I predicted the growth of FPP but not that of CEP.

Below are the rankings of free-market think tanks scoring first or second in the United States and from around the world (data compiled during the last week of February 2019 and the first week of March 2019):

- Most Facebook likes (U.S.): #1 Heritage Foundation (2,062K) #2 Acton Institute (795K); (Non-U.S.): #1 Instituto Mises, Brazil (288K), #2 ILISP, Brazil (277K)
- Most Twitter followers (U.S.): #1 Heritage Foundation (640K) #2 Cato (354K); (Non U.S.): #1 CEDICE, Venezuela (107K) #2 (tie) CEP, Chile and ILISP, Brazil (61.6K)
- Most monthly visitors to website (SimilarWeb), U.S.: #1 Heritage Foundation (2,740K) #2 FEE (1,660K); (Non-U.S.): #1 Instituto Mises, Brazil (1,310K) #2 ILISP, Brazil (490K). Alexa, the Web analytics company owned by Amazon, also ranks these groups highly.
- Most subscribers to YouTube (U.S.): #1 American Enterprise Institute (163K) #2 FEE (86K); (Non-U.S.): #1 Instituto Mises, Brazil (44K) #2 Fundación Libertad y Progreso, Argentina (38K).
- Most views of YouTube video uploaded in 2018 (U.S.): #1 Foundation for Economic Education (659K) #2 American Enterprise Institute (207K); (Non-U.S.): #1 Fundación Libertad y Progreso, Argentina (93K) #2 Fundación Para el Progreso, Chile (74K)
- Most minutes viewed on a YouTube video (last 12 months) (U.S.): #1 Foundation for Economic Education (7,335K) #2 Heritage Foundation (6,029K); (Non-U.S.) #1 Centro de Estudios Públicos, Chile (2,002K) #2 Fundación Para el Progreso, Chile (1,424K)
- Most LinkedIn followers (U.S.): #1 Heritage Foundation (17.9K) #2 American Enterprise Institute (15.8K); (Non-U.S.): #1 Fraser Institute, Canada (6K) #2 Instituto Mises, Brazil (4.4K)
- Most Instagram followers (U.S.): #1 Heritage Foundation (40.6K) #2 Cato Institute (22.3K); (Non-U.S.): #1 Instituto Mises, Brazil (38K) #2 ILISP, Brazil (25.4K)

PragerU's continued success

PragerU is neither a think tank nor a university, but rather an organization that tries to influence the debate with short videos. Its strong focus on its core social media product and intelligent use of infographics and animation continues to pay off. It continues to outperform much older and more established organizations. It has more than **10** times the number of YouTube subscribers than the leading market-oriented think tank (AEI), and **five** times more than the second group in the media category (Reason). It has similar dominance on Instagram.

The leaders in United States pro-free-market videos, magazines, and news outlets include:

- Most Facebook likes: #1 PragerU (3,225K) #2 CNSnews (2,291K)
- Most Twitter followers: #1 National Review (318K) #2 Reason (229K)
- Most monthly visitors to website (SimilarWeb): #1 National Review (12,090K) #2 Reason (5,730K)
- Most subscribers to YouTube Channel: #1 PragerU (2,006K) #2 Reason (414K)
- Most views of YouTube video (uploaded in 2018): #1 PragerU (8,684K) #2 Reason (1,046K)
- Most minutes viewed on a single YouTube video (last 12 months): #1 PragerU (44,580K) #2 Reason (6,291K)
- Most Instagram followers: #1 PragerU (399K) #2 National Review (31K)

Among student organizations, TurningPointUSA continues with its impressive growth. It ranks first in Twitter followers, where it more than doubled in one year, as well as in Facebook likes. Last year I forecast that it would reach a million likes at the end of 2018, and it easily beat that mark. It is also far ahead in Instagram and was slightly ahead of Young America's Foundation for the most minutes watched for a single YouTube video. Students for Liberty is first in LinkedIn. I expect that TurningPoint will become the leader in all categories soon.

Among grassroots and activist groups, FreedomWorks continues to lead Americans for Prosperity on Twitter and Facebook and in YouTube subscribers, while the latter is ahead in YouTube views, Instagram and LinkedIn.

University- and college-based centers continue to lag behind their think tank competitors. Hoover Institution (at Stanford University) and Mercatus Center (at George Mason University) are the leaders. In this subsector, Hoover leads Mercatus in all social media outcomes except the use of LinkedIn, where they are almost tied.

As usual, I shared my database with Emma Álvarez, who works in corporate marketing and communications at IESE business school in Barcelona. What caught her eye is the American Enterprise Institute's video strategy, which combines one-minute YouTube films with full-length debates about current issues. Although the trend in the United States is toward shorter videos, in other countries there is still an appetite for more substantial material. In my calculations of most minutes watched for a single video, the winners this year among foreign organizations were two long videos by Chilean organizations.

Latin American Think Tanks Lead In Country Penetration

This is the first time I have weighted social media traffic by country size and by number of people with access to the Internet. Market-oriented think tanks in Latin America captured the top places on Facebook and Twitter. PragerU and TurningPoint USA were first when taking into account a more diverse group of free-society organizations.

Think Tank	Twitter	Think Tank	Facebook	Think Tank	Top Video	Think Tank	LinkedIn	Think Tank	Instagram	Think Tank	Web
CEDICE (Venezuela)	5,649	FPP (Chile)	11,339	CEP (Chile)	169,320	Fraser Institute (Canada)	186	FPP (Chile)	777	Heritage (USA)	11,164
CEP (Chile)	5,211	Heritage (USA)	8,403	FPP (Chile)	120,264	Heritage (USA)	73	Mises (Brazil)	306	Mises (Brazil)	10,571
LyD (Chile)	3,273	IMANI (Ghana)	3,904	FEE (USA)	29,886	AEI (USA)	64	CEP (Chile)	283	Fraser Institute (Canada)	10,290

Leading Think Tanks in Country Social Media Penetration 2019

Free-market think tank social media penetration:

- Facebook (Likes per million people and per million Internet users): #1 Fundación Para El Progreso, Chile (7K, 11.3K) #2 Heritage Foundation, U.S. (6.3K, 8.4K)
- Twitter (Followers per million people and per million Internet users): #1 CEDICE, Venezuela (3.3K, 5.6K) #2 CEP, Chile (3.2K, 5.2K)
- YouTube (Minutes watched per million people and per million Internet users): #1 CEP, Chile (104K, 169K) #2 Fundación Para El Progreso, Chile (74K, 120K)
- Instagram (Followers per million people and per million Internet users): #1 Fundación Para El Progreso, Chile (480, 777) #2 Instituto Mises, Brazil (181, 306)
- LinkedIn (Connections per million people and per million Internet users): #1 Fraser Institute, Canada (162, 186) #2 Heritage (54, 73)
- SimilarWeb (Monthly unique visitors per million people and million Internet users): #1 Heritage (8,334, 11,164) #2 Fraser Institute (8,973, 10,290)

Top scorers in advocacy, media and students groups in social media penetration (listed only when they outperform think tanks)

- Instagram (Followers per million people and per million Internet users): #1 PragerU (1.2K, 1.6K) #2 TurningPoint USA (1.1K, 1.5K)
- SimilarWeb (Monthly unique visitors per million people and million Internet users): #1 National Review (37K, 49K) #2 Reason (17K, 23K)
- YouTube (Minutes watched per million people and per million Internet users): #1 PragerU (182K)

- Facebook (Likes per million people and per million Internet users): #1FreedomWorks (15K, 20K) #2 PragerU (10K, 13K)

Challenges for Think Tanks and Universities

The challenge to promote policy solutions, educational products and sound research through social media will continue. I have yet to analyze how think tanks and universities are using podcasts and how they rank on this front. Heritage Foundation alone has had more than a million podcast downloads since they started posting them. Some think tanks, but only a minority, are also trying to be influential in Snapchat, which is used more by females and younger users. With the effort to reach millennials, it is easy to forecast a growth in Instagram, but the moment the posts start to seem like institutionally sponsored content, I predict millennials will lose attention. Leading think tanks like Heritage analyze all their traffic carefully, and their knowledge that minorities and females are more active than average on Instagram helps to guide their posts.

Think tanks and universities are also facing a challenge from individuals with good communication skills and with messages and content that does not find a place in traditional channels. Take the case of what I consider the greatest change and opportunity for market reform in the Americas: the new Brazilian government. A Brazilian philosopher, Olavo de Carvalho, who has influenced the minds of many in the current government of Jair Bolsonaro, has a larger following on social media than all the Brazilian free-society, market-oriented think tanks combined.

When trying to convince donors of their effectiveness on social media, many think tanks will focus on the particular ranking where they have a high score. They will seldom post how much money they spend per person reached. Some of the think tanks with the best outcomes are the least cost-effective. I have not done the rankings based on social media impact per dollar spent, but I doubt that in impact per dollar any think tank would beat CEDICE, the Venezuelan group that operates with a very low budget. I also doubt that any think tank can compete with philosopher Carvalho.

I stand with many of my think tank colleagues who argue that social media cannot and should not become the key measurement for think tank success. But it is one of the only fields where one can access open-source information in order to compare the work of groups engaged in public policy.

Congratulations to all the groups mentioned in this piece and my apologies if I missed a better-scoring free-market organization.