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# **Think tanks in developing countries: How important is visibility?**

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# Outline

- The think tank function
- The evolution of hybrids
- The problem with visibility
- Conclusions

# Main arguments

- While visibility is important...
  1. Visibility does not necessarily translate into substantive influence;
  2. Substantive influence is more important than visibility; and
  3. How this happens in developing countries is likely to be through ‘non-traditional’ organisational arrangements

# An important distinction

International development  
think tanks



BROOKINGS



vs.

Think tanks in developing  
countries





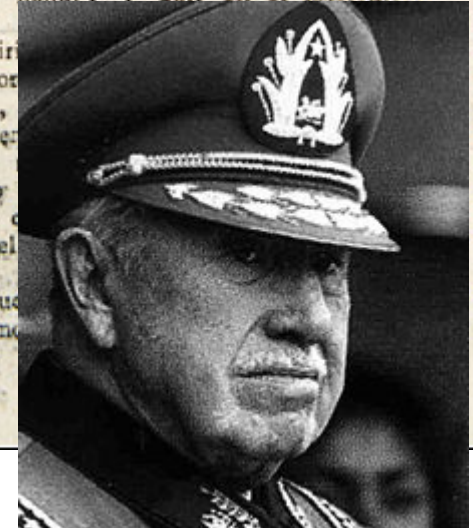
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# The think tank functions

1. Seek support for policies
2. Legitimise policies
3. Spaces of debate – sounding boards
4. Financial channels for political parties or other interest groups
5. Expert cadres of policy-makers and politicians

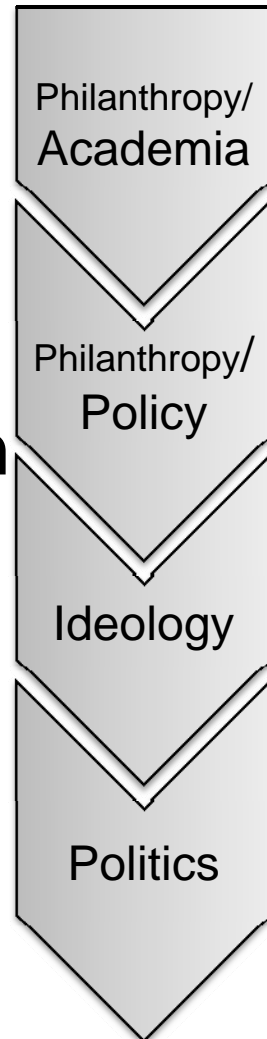
# Difference

- Unique origins
- Close relations with other
- Evolution of the context  
evolution of think tanks



# This is the same in the US

- Industrial revolution donors: progressive believe in science
- Post Wall Street Crash: contain social disaffection
- Second World War: more complex foreign policy and military strategies
- Cold War: beat the Russians (and all that implies)
- The conservative swing: Get the Republicans into the White House



# ... it should not surprise that

- Hybrids are the norm... and that they all look different

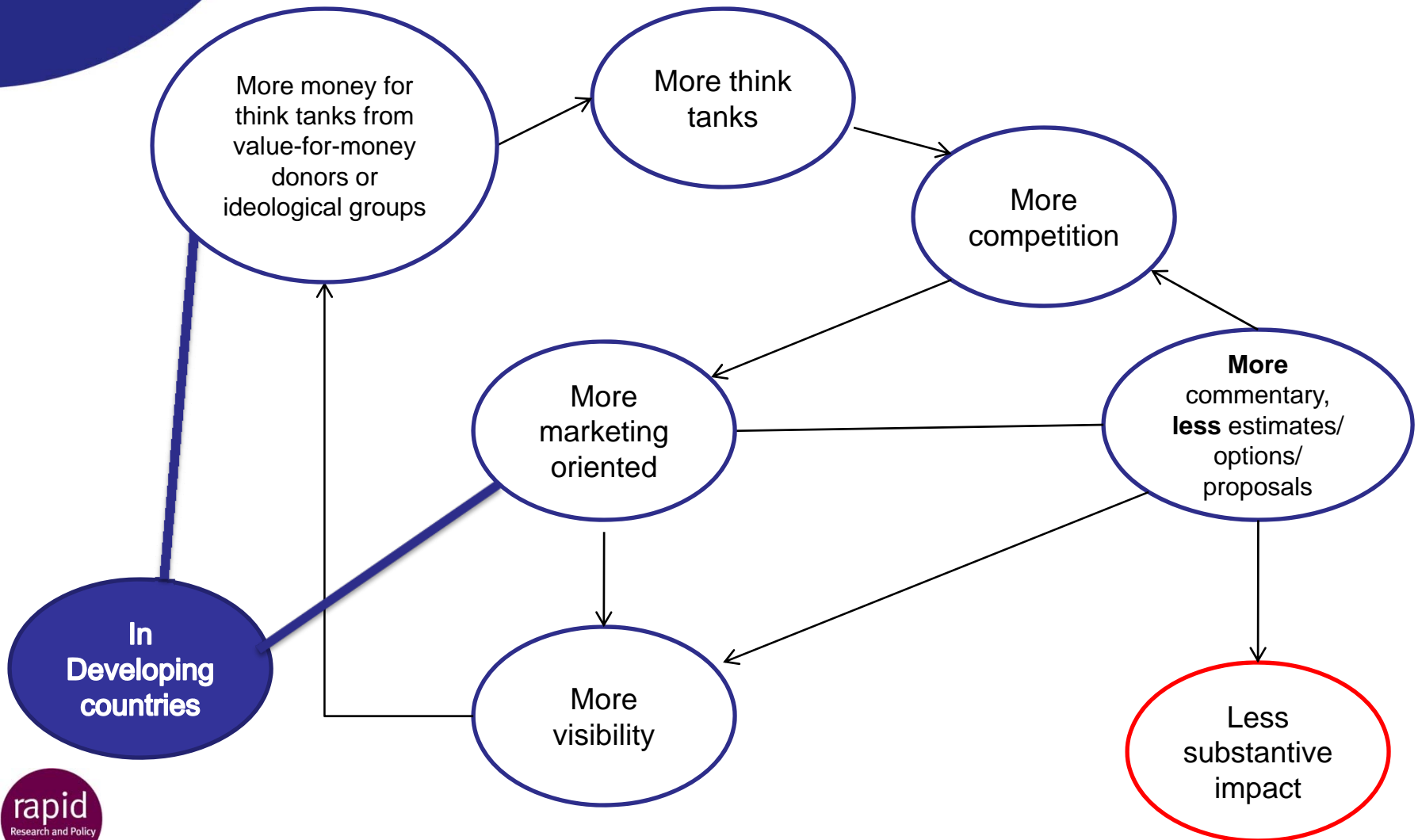




# Visibility for what?

- Visibility can be a good thing:
  - It can lead to more funds
  - It can lead to influence
- But the visibility effort can undermine the capacity to bring about substantive influence

# A tragedy in the making?



Adapted from Andrew Rich (2006)

# Some challenges

1. Funding can make demands on the strategy
2. Visibility can detract from substantive influence and even reduce credibility
3. Developing communication competencies could undermine research competencies (limited resources in developing countries)
4. New competitors – with whom we cannot really compete

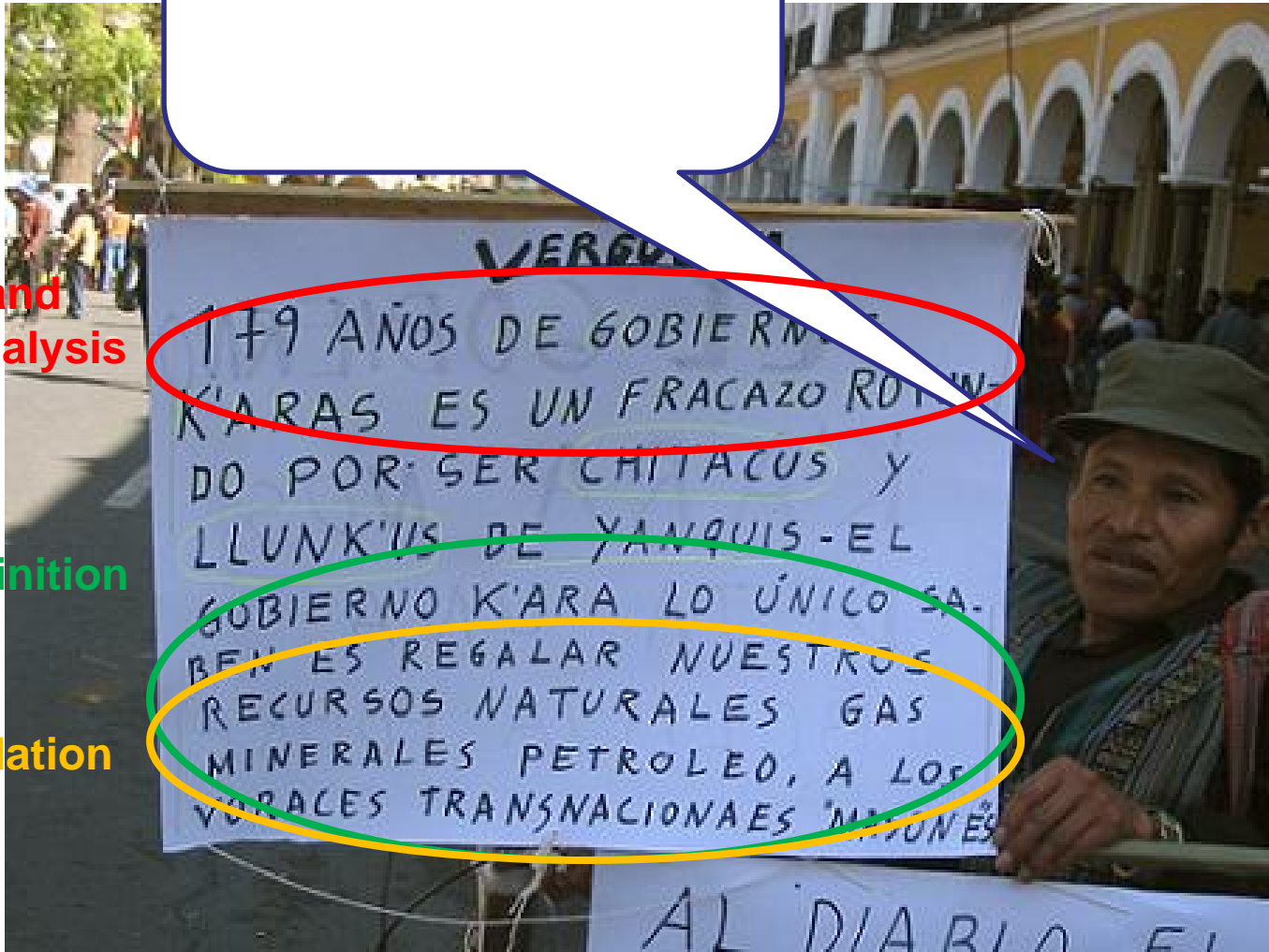
# demand too

And I can **VOTE**

Context and  
historical analysis

Problem definition

Policy  
recommendation



# Who knows us matters

- The Go-To-think tanks index for Peru includes:

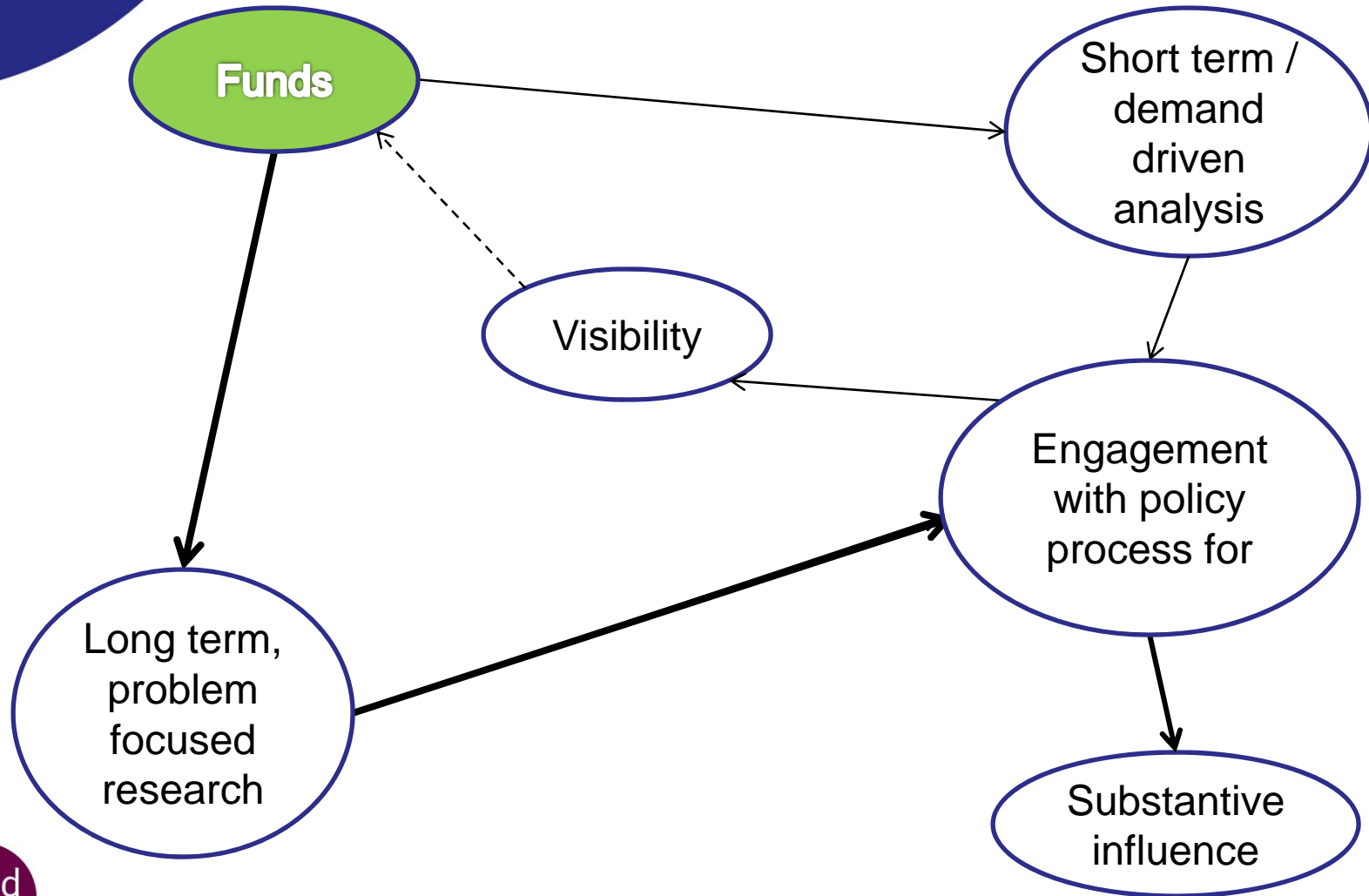
- Apoyo
- ILD
- IEP
- IDL
- UPC
- ILE

## But it does not include:

- Foro Educativo
  - CIUP
  - GRADE
- Instituto de Gobierno (USMP)
  - PUCP
- ~~Mezconconsult~~

The Instituto de Gobierno was proposed by Alan García in 2001. He was an active participant in the Institute until he came to power in 2006.

# How visibility can lead to substance



# Some non-negotiables

- Think tanks must command high quality research for substantive influence
- Think tanks must reach policymakers (because long gone are the days when they came looking for research)
- Think tanks must be visible (public does not mean private anymore)
- Think tanks must be credible
- **And they must be relevant to their context**



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Thank you

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