Crowded Out

Crowded Out delves into the complex landscape of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Bush and Hadden trace INGOs' rise to prominence at the end of the twentieth century and three significant but overlooked recent trends: a decrease in new INGO foundings, despite persistent global need; a shift toward specialization, despite the complexity of global problems; and a dispersal of INGO activities globally, despite potential gains from concentrating on areas of acute need. Assembling a wealth of new data on INGO foundings, missions, and locations, Bush and Hadden show how INGOs are being crowded out of dense organizational environments. They conduct case studies of INGOs across issue areas, relying on dozens of interviews and a large-scale survey to bring practitioners' voices to the study of INGOs. To effectively address today's global challenges, organizations must innovate in a crowded world. This title is also available as open access on Cambridge Core.

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Crowded Out

The Competitive Landscape of Contemporary International NGOs

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Preface

The world today has many pressing problems and ample areas of acute need. International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) are one of the main channels through which individuals engage in collective action to address issues beyond their own country's borders. INGOs are organizations with a significant collective footprint, reporting tens of billions of dollars in revenue and channeling a substantial percentage of overseas development assistance in recent years. INGOs must thus simultaneously advance their goals of social change and manage the realities of operating as organizations. The tensions that arise from these twin pursuits permeate this book.

In conducting our research, we were privileged to speak with many INGO practitioners. The need to balance bold goals and pragmatic organizational realities is a constant struggle for those working in this sector. In our conversations, we found it notable how open and self-critical INGO staff tend to be, often speaking quite frankly about some of the biggest challenges in their work. We were routinely impressed by their desire to engage in self-evaluation and greatly appreciate them sharing their insights. Our first debt is to all those respondents who participated in this project's interviews, focus groups, and survey. We hope that this book adequately reflects their voices and the strategic issues that they encounter in their work.

Our motivation for writing this book stems from two sources. Prior to starting this project, both of us had studied the politics of INGOs in different issue areas. In previous work, Hadden documented the massive influx in civil society actors working on climate change issues at the time of the 2009 Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change. This research drew her attention to a paradox: While scholars would intuitively expect more INGOs to be associated with better advocacy outcomes, the reality was much more mixed, with long-sought population growth bringing attendant problems of communication and coordination. At the conclusion of that project, she wondered whether similar dynamics might apply to other cases and in other issue areas.

Bush has been intrigued by the challenges faced by nonprofit organizations since her time coleading a small INGO during the year before graduate school (and then later serving on its board). After experiencing the challenges of securing funding for an INGO firsthand, she conducted research on how competition among INGOs engaged in democracy assistance encouraged those groups to adopt a more technical and less confrontational approach to promoting democracy overseas. After finishing this project, she wondered how competition might be affecting INGOs that are active in other issue areas.

The initial seed for a joint project was planted at a workshop on Organizational Ecology and International Relations held at Princeton University in 2014. Although Kenneth W. Abbott, Jessica F. Green, and Robert O. Keohane organized the workshop to discuss their important research using organizational ecology to study slowing growth in formal intergovernmental organizations, we quickly became convinced of organizational ecology's great value as a framework to explore trends in INGO politics, as well. We thank the organizers and participants in this workshop for the stimulating discussion that gave birth to this idea and our friendship.

Aspects of this project have been presented at numerous conferences and workshops, including the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association and International Studies Association and seminars hosted by the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, City University of New York, Georgetown University, and Temple University. We have received insightful feedback from colleagues in all of those settings and many others, which has greatly improved the work. In particular, we'd like to acknowledge the participants in our book workshop – Michael N. Barnett, Jennifer N. Brass, Alexander Cooley, Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Daniel Nielson, and Sarah S. Stroup – who took time out of their busy schedules to read and comment on the entire manuscript. Our work has been greatly enhanced by their generous and incisive feedback.

We also acknowledge the support that we have received from our departmental colleagues at Temple University, the University of Maryland, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University. This group

includes especially David Cunningham, Virginia Haufler, and Margaret Pearson at University of Maryland; Orfeo Fioretos, Alexandra Guisinger, and Mark Pollack at Temple; Alexandre Debs and Tyler Pratt at Yale; and Julia Gray at University of Pennsylvania. Outside of our home departments, we received thoughtful feedback from Cristina Balboa, Elizabeth Bloodgood, Mark Buntaine, Xun Cao, Jeff Colgan, Stephen Chaudoin, Maryam Zarnegar Deloffre, Jennifer Dixon, Marty Finnemore, Erin Graham, Jessica Green, Tana Johnson, Bob Keohane, Jesse Lecy, Yon Lupu, Elizabeth Nugent, Woody Powell, Aseem Prakash, Lauren Prather, Paloma Raggo, Hans-Peter Schmitz, Kathryn Sikkink, Jonas Tallberg, Sid Tarrow, Joannie Tremblay-Boire, Felicity Vabulas, and Yael Zeira, among many others.

Many research assistants supported the empirical analyses. They included a number of skilled graduate students: Eden Aaron, Trey Billings, Ed Hendrickson, Connor Kopchick, Sloan Lansdale, Melissa Pavlik, Gino Pauselli, Ryan Pike, and Alauna Safarpour. We benefited from undergraduate research assistance, as well, particularly from Chloe Adda, Gabriel Ben-Jakov, MacKenzie Bonner, Michael Fitzpatrick, Caleb Nolan, Nhan Nguyen, Fatih Fain Oman, Sasha Thomas, and Juanita Garcia Uribe.

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We thank our editor at Cambridge University Press, John Haslam, for his support of this project. We also received thoughtful comments from anonymous reviewers. Kelley Friel carefully edited our text. Derek Gottlieb provided us with a skillful index. Some of the material in Chapter 3 was previously published in *International Studies Quarterly*. We thank Oxford University Press for granting permission to reproduce it here, and we also acknowledge the editors, reviewers, and colleagues who gave us feedback on that article, which has shaped the book in valuable ways.

Our personal debts are even more significant than our professional ones. During the ten years since we first met, we have both undertaken major career and life transitions, all the while watching world politics change in significant ways. In recent years, our young children Linus, Walter, and Julian have inspired us with their curiosity and motivated us to better understand the potential and pitfalls of efforts to improve the world. We dedicate the book to our spouses – David Cormode and Scott Frick – whose constancy during tumultuous periods of political change and early parenthood has been essential to our ability to complete this work. We are ever grateful for their love and support.

Sarah Bush,
Philadelphia, August, 2024

Jennifer Hadden,
Washington D.C., August, 2024

Abbreviations

AMF	Against Malaria Foundation
APSA	American Political Science Association
BMGF	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
CARE	Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe
CEO	Chief executive officer
CEPPS	Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening
CSO	Civil society organization
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IGO	Intergovernmental organization
IJA	International Judicial Academy
INGO	International nongovernmental organization
IR	International relations
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
MSF	Médecins San Frontières
NCCS	National Center for Charitable Statistics
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
ODA	Overseas development assistance
OLS	Ordinary least squares
OSF	Open Society Foundations
PFSCM	Partnership for Supply Chain Management
PI	Pandas International

PTRO	Private transnational regulatory organization
RA	Research assistant
SMO	Social movement organization
TSMOD	Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy
WCN	Wildlife Conservation Network
WINGO	World of International Organizations (WINGO) Dataset
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
YIO	Yearbook of International Organizations

1 *Introduction*

On December 26, 2004, a major earthquake struck off the west coast of northern Sumatra, Indonesia. Within an hour of the initial quake, a tsunami with waves up to 100 feet hit communities along the Indian Ocean, causing massive devastation in countries including Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and India. The Asian Tsunami, as it came to be known, is widely considered to be the worst natural disaster of the twenty-first century so far, leaving more than 225,000 dead and at least 1.7 million people displaced.[1]

Individual donations for tsunami relief and reconstruction broke all previous records.[2] The general public contributed a record $5.5 billion, or about 40 percent of all international funding.[3] The American public was the largest national source of individual donations, with an estimated 25 percent of US households making donations totaling at least $2.8 billion in the two years following the tsunami.[4] These private donations surpassed the over $900 million in aid provided by the US government, the largest state donor.[5]

International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) played a central role in the unprecedented Asian Tsunami relief effort. INGOs received the majority of private donations and were responsible for implementing around a quarter of all government commitments.[6] American INGOs were particularly well funded given

1 Goff and Dudley (2021).
2 Cosgrave (2007).
3 Flint and Goyder (2006, 22). Individual donors typically provide about 15 percent of the total resources for natural disaster relief and reconstruction.
4 Philanthropy News Digest, "Americans Donated More Than $3 Billion to Tsunami Relief Efforts, Study Finds," 2006. Available at https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/americans-donated-more-than-3-billion-to-tsunami-relief-efforts-study-finds (last accessed September 30, 2024).
5 Inderfurth, Febrycky, and Cohen (2005).
6 Flint and Goyder (2006, 8).

the generosity of the US public and government, both of which prefer to channel their funds to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) headquartered in the United States rather than those based abroad.[7] As a result of their significant funds, INGOs' operational role was substantial. For example, the World Bank estimated that INGOs financed 42 percent of reconstruction and development projects in Indonesia, the hardest hit country.[8]

The Asian Tsunami stands out in comparison to other natural disasters precisely because it involved more INGOs than ever before. They were the biggest component of the "second tsunami" of aid organizations in the region,[9] and observers noted that "the flood of INGOs created a congestion of humanitarian space."[10] By one count, there were over 400 groups active in Indonesia,[11] whereas before the disaster, only a handful of INGOs were present in the hardest hit areas.[12] American INGOs were especially numerous. By one count there were 202 INGOs that received private donations for the tsunami[13]; of these, at least 155 were American INGOs.[14] Of the top ten INGOs receiving private funding for tsunami relief and reconstruction, six were headquartered in the United States.[15]

There are many reasons to think that the Asian Tsunami response should have been a huge success. A report from the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (a multiagency learning and accountability initiative of the humanitarian sector) described it as "the most generous and immediately funded humanitarian response in history"[16]; it was perhaps the only instance of an adequately funded relief effort following a major natural disaster. The event was covered by the media to an unprecedented extent, dominating new outlets for weeks and keeping public attention (and donations) focused on the crisis.[17] It drew high-level

7 Flint and Goyder (2006, 17); Kerlin (2013).
8 Inderfurth, Febrycky, and Cohen (2005).
9 Cosgrave (2007, 16).
10 Bennett et al. (2006, 11).
11 Jayasuriya and McCawley (2010, 14).
12 Canny (2005).
13 Flint and Goyder (2006, 22).
14 Inderfurth, Febrycky, and Cohen (2005).
15 See Flint and Goyder (2006, 26). Note that the authors consolidate all the Oxfam national offices into one organization, including Oxfam USA.
16 Flint and Goyder (2006, 19).
17 Brown and Minty (2008, 13).

political attention, including the appointment of former US President Bill Clinton as the United Nations (UN) Secretary General's Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery. And, as mentioned earlier, the scale of the crisis drew many humanitarian INGOs to areas of the world that had been previously neglected by global audiences.

But while we might expect that more INGOs would produce better results – especially in the context of ample funding – the final analysis indicates that the relief effort was disappointing. The Tsunami Evaluation Committee concluded, "the international response to the tsunami disaster helped the affected people and reduced their suffering . . . however, overall the studies conclude that the response did not achieve the potential offered by the generous funding."[18] It went on to say:

> One area where there was a clear lack of proportional response to needs in the tsunami response was the number of agencies. Organisations [sic] poured into the affected areas . . . While the number of agencies sometimes resulted in better levels of service for the beneficiaries, it also led to duplication and waste . . . Proliferation consumed local resources as communities tried to sort out the competing agencies.[19]

Other sources concurred with this assessment about the negative consequences of a crowded organizational environment. The international president of Médecins San Frontières at the time stated, "To a certain extent, the presence of so many helping bodies, each of which needed administrative support [from local people] slowed down the deployment of aid."[20] In a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing in 2005, a staff member similarly reported that there was a significant amount of money available for projects and ample implementing partners but "access was delayed by . . . poor coordination between the various ministries, donors countries, and NGOs."[21]

Much of this criticism was directed pointedly toward the sheer number of INGOs and their resulting competitiveness with one another. As this book will show, the number of INGOs – globally and in

[18] Cosgrave (2007, 3).
[19] Ibid. (16).
[20] Sibbald (2005).
[21] Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, "Tsunami Response: Lessons Learned," 2005. Available at www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-109shrg23942/html/CHRG-109shrg23942.htm (last accessed February 23, 2024).

the United States – had exploded in the previous decade, creating a large population of organizations with a mission to assist with this type of humanitarian catastrophe. But the arrival of so many INGO staff strained local systems of housing, transportation, and communications, sometimes pitting INGO staff against local beneficiaries for the same services.[22] One source described the actions of INGOs on the ground as "competitive humanitarianism"[23]; the rapid influx of INGOs led to pressure to spend money quickly, resulting in a duplication and a lack of coordination.[24] Unlike many other examples we will describe in this book, the observed competition here was not primarily over financial resources; instead, INGOs active in Asian Tsuanmi relief fought for local resources needed to spend their already-acquired funds. In one poignant example, medical staff from two field hospitals were observed fighting over the same patient.[25] These battles led some organizations to attempt to move outside their core competencies in order to find a less crowded environment, but their inexperience performing new functions further undermined the relief effort.[26]

Doubtlessly, INGOs did much good for Asian Tsunami relief. A large INGO response was both necessary and appropriate to provide support for the large number of affected people. But the dramatic density of INGOs also exceeded the amount of need for or capacity to accept relief in some areas, with negative effects on the resulting service delivery. In sum, this case illustrates why more is not necessarily better.

Related dynamics can be observed in many other areas of INGO activity. Alexander Cooley and James Ron described similar growth in the number of groups working on the issue of refugees: "In 1980, a total of 37 foreign relief agencies operated within one Cambodian refugee camp; in 1995, by contrast, 200 agencies flooded the refugee camps in Goma, the vortex of Hutu–Tutsi devastation in Rwanda."[27] And they also associated this growing density with increased competition that undermines effective service delivery. Similar criticisms

22 Jayasuriya and McCawley (2010, 14).
23 Stirrat (2006).
24 Inderfurth, Febrycky, and Cohen (2005); Thompson (2011).
25 Schulze (2005) cited in Cosgrave (2007, 17).
26 Flint and Goyder (2006, 16).
27 Cooley and Ron (2002, 10).

of "too many NGOs" have emerged regarding the 425 INGOs working in refugee camps on the Greek island of Lesbos in 2020, where large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers arrive from the Middle East and North Africa via Turkey.[28] The humanitarian response to the 2010 earthquake and 2016 hurricane in Haiti was also criticized for an overabundance of INGOs that lacked coordination.[29]

In the global health sector, some observers argue that "the deluge of INGOs and their expatriate workers over the past decade has fragmented the local health system."[30] Every major meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is accompanied by narratives about how the meetings have grown "too big" as the result of the presence of a proliferating number of INGOs and other civil society observers.[31] A long-time practitioner in civil society and democracy promotion observed that the issue area's INGO landscape "suffers from a diffuse and fractured organizational setup that results in too little strategic thinking and too much micromanagement."[32] On the country level, the NGO sector (including both domestic and international groups) has been described as proliferating, crowded, and even saturated in places such as Kenya, Guatemala, and Bangladesh.[33] A Tunisian civil society leader described her country as overrun by INGOs after the 2011 revolution there, saying, "I think it's a

[28] Madeline Speed, "Aid Workers Face Growing Hostility on Lesbos," *Al Jazeera*, February 15, 2020. Available at www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/2/15/aid-workers-face-growing-hostility-on-lesbos (last accessed July 23, 2023). Helen Nianias, "Refugees in Lesbos: Are There Too Many NGOs on the Island?" *The Guardian*, January 5, 2016. Available at www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/jan/05/refugees-in-lesbos-are-there-too-many-ngos-on-the-island (last accessed July 23, 2023).

[29] For example, Kristoff and Panarelli (2010).

[30] Barber and Bowie (2008).

[31] For example, see Bob Berwyn, "Has the UN Climate Change Conference Gotten Too Big to Work?" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2022. Available at https://thebulletin.org/2022/12/has-the-un-climate-change-conference-gotten-too-big-to-work/ (last accessed July 23, 2023). Michael Jacobs, "Circuses Have Evolved and So Must UN Climate Summits," *Climate Home News*, 2022. Available at www.climatechangenews.com/2023/02/05/circuses-have-evolved-and-so-must-un-climate-summits/ (last accessed July 23, 2023).

[32] Melia (2006, 123).

[33] See Brass (2012) on Kenya, Beck (2014, 152) on Guatemala, and Haque (2002) on Bangladesh. We further discuss this issue in Chapter 5.

dictatorship of INGOs. Is Tunisia just another cake that international organizations are trying to share the pieces of?"[34]

Practitioners have noticed this increased density in the INGO population. One development leader explained to us, "There are two really heavy books in the world: that is the Bible and the directory of NGOs. And the directory of NGOs is probably bigger than the Bible … you will be hard pressed to find something that isn't covered already."[35] And many leaders have connected rising density to growing competition. As one executive at a large humanitarian INGO told us, "There has been a proliferation of NGOs … it's increased the number of sharks circling a much smaller pool."[36] Another relief practitioner advised would-be founders to be aware "you are entering a crowded space that is right now not sustainable."[37] But despite the salience of rising density and competition to those working at INGOs, scholars have neither sufficiently documented these important developments nor theorized their impact. This book takes up those tasks.

We demonstrate how population density and competition influence the strategies of INGO leaders and entrepreneurs. Our approach provides an explanation for three important but puzzling trends (elaborated in Section 1.2), with an emphasis on American INGOs since the end of the Cold War. First, fewer INGOs are being created, even though unmet needs remain substantial and available resources are steady if not increasing. Second, INGOs are becoming narrower in their missions, even though global issues are arguably becoming more complex and interconnected. And third, INGOs are increasingly dispersing their activities globally, avoiding "crowded" areas, even though concentrating efforts in areas of acute need may be more efficient or just.

By examining the core strategies of INGO leaders who are operating in the dense and competitive world of contemporary international nonprofits, this book reflects on what developments among INGOs mean for the future of world politics. We are arguably at a turning point for

[34] Interview, Tunisian civil society leader, in person, May 14, 2012. Quoted in Bush (2015, 201).

[35] Interview, Paul Bode, Vice President for Global Operations, ChildFund International, July 16, 2021, on Zoom.

[36] Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 13, 2022.

[37] Interview with executive at American relief INGO, October 8, 2021, by Zoom.

INGOs' strategic choices. As one INGO executive an American peace and security organization explained to us:

> I think we're past peak NGO ... the moment of NGOs was the post-Cold War moment into the 2000s and the 2010s. That's a moment that isn't going away, but ... I think it was a product of the post-Cold War order and as that order fades, so does ... the role of the NGO as international service provider. [The INGO] necessarily needs to redefine itself.[38]

Our book explores what happens "past peak NGO": How INGOs define themselves in this new era and what the implications are for world politics.

1.1 The Conventional Wisdom and Its Limits

International nongovernmental organizations have nonprofit status in their countries of origin and work in at least one additional country. There are three common ways of thinking about INGOs.

The first and most simplistic view is that they are "do-gooders" and forces for positive change in the world. The idea that INGOs are virtuous actors is a baseline expectation for many audiences and an important foundation for INGOs' authority, yet few scholarly studies adopt this approach uncritically.[39] Certainly, findings from classic studies such as Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's *Activists Beyond Borders* reinforce the image of INGOs contributing to a better world. As their book describes, during the twentieth century, INGOs became key actors within new transnational advocacy networks that promoted policy change on issues related to the environment, human rights, and women's rights.[40] Despite the growing prominence of politically conservative INGOs in world politics,[41] scholars commonly associate INGOs with the rise of liberal international norms.[42] For instance, INGOs convinced states to adopt the 1997 Ottawa Convention and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty.[43] INGOs have served as

38 Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 13, 2022.
39 Gourevitch and Lake (2012).
40 Keck and Sikkink (1998); Busby (2010).
41 Bob (2012); Ayoub and Stoeckl (2024b).
42 Finnemore and Sikkink (1998); Reimann (2006).
43 Price (1998).

election monitors and human rights reporters, defining – and in some cases enforcing – international norms around these issues and creating a host of new rankings and ratings of states' performance.[44] They have gained access and influence within the UN and other intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and have helped inform their staffs and shape the global policy agenda.[45] And they directly contribute to the "governing" of many global issue areas.[46]

Second, the more critical revisionist view of INGOs often faults them for sacrificing their principles in the pursuit of more self-interested concerns. According to this perspective, INGOs are more akin to for-profit firms than principled activists.[47] It suggests that INGOs are ineffective – or less effective than they could be – because they focus on the countries, issues, or approaches that are likely to help them acquire resources and survive in the short term. The marketplace for INGOs is competitive, but given how difficult it is for funders to evaluate INGO effectiveness in complex global issues, it does not necessarily select INGOs for good performance. Thus, INGOs may not be as successful as we would hope.[48] For example, competitive pressures undermined the collective action necessary for INGOs to protest the misuse of refugee aid in the Democratic Republic of Congo and spurred social movements in Nigeria and Mexico to reframe their grievances to match foreign INGO preferences.[49] The same characteristics that help large INGOs like Conservation International build their global reputations and attract substantial grant funding can also draw them away from local partners and needs.[50]

Whereas the revisionist view accepts that INGOs seek to do good and faults them for falling short, the third (even more critical) perspective questions their *intentions*. This view takes issue with the power dynamics common in INGO work. US and European governments have increasingly used INGOs to implement their foreign policies and

[44] Hyde (2011); Kelley (2012); Cooley (2015); Kelley and Simmons (2019); Jurkovich (2020).
[45] Tallberg et al. (2013); Johnson (2016); Tallberg et al. (2018); Dörfler and Heinzel (2023).
[46] Avant, Finnemore, and Sell (2010).
[47] Prakash and Gugerty (2010).
[48] Mitchell, Schmitz, and van Vijfeijken (2020).
[49] Cooley and Ron (2002); Bob (2005).
[50] Balboa (2018).

project power.[51] For some analysts, the relationship between Western states and INGOs is an asset, but for others, it is a liability that undermines performance.[52] Moreover, most INGOs are headquartered in the Global North (see Section 1.3), although there are important exceptions such as the influential international development INGO BRAC that is headquartered in Bangladesh. This pattern fosters deep inequalities within transnational INGO networks: organizations based in the Global North typically have significantly more influence and resources than their counterparts in the Global South.[53] Many INGOs profess a commitment to global justice as part of their missions but replicate global hierarchies in practice, which creates a paradox that some have termed the "white savior industrial complex" and that increasingly challenges INGOs' legitimacy.[54] To address this paradox, some INGOs from the Global North have reorganized themselves. For instance, Amnesty International has become more decentralized since 2011 and has moved some staff from its London headquarters to regional offices in the Global South.[55] These trends are part of a broader push toward localization in foreign aid, humanitarianism, and other domains (discussed in detail in Chapter 6).

Some of the harshest criticisms of INGOs have come from within the organizations themselves. When he was Secretary General of CIVICUS (a civil society INGO headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa since 2002), Danny Sriskandarajah wrote in 2016 that it is "becoming increasingly clear that their organisational [sic] model needs to undergo radical transformation to keep pace with changing needs, new technologies, and a shifting global landscape."[56] The results of our large-scale survey of INGO leaders in 2019 (described in more

[51] Sending and Neumann (2006).
[52] Edwards and Hulme (2018).
[53] Hughes et al. (2018); Cheng et al. (2021).
[54] Teju Cole, "The White Savior Industrial Complex," *The Atlantic*, March 21, 2012. Available at www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/ (last accessed October 2, 2023).
[55] Samuel Oakford, "VICE News Talks Human Rights with Salil Shetty, the Head of Amnesty International," *Vice.com*, September 29, 2014. Available at www.vice.com/en/article/ev77n7/vice-news-talks-human-rights-with-salil-shetty-the-head-of-amnesty-international (last accessed January 6, 2023).
[56] Danny Sriskandarajah, "Five Things International NGOs Are Blamed For," *Trust.org*, June 13, 2016. Available at https://news.trust.org/item/20160613131744-uctfe/ (last accessed February 7, 2023).

detail in Section 1.3) suggest a meaningful minority agree: 13 percent of respondents said they thought INGOs working in their sector were ineffective, and 35 percent thought their sector was not innovative.

A challenge for debates about whether INGOs are primarily principled or pragmatic actors is that most organizations clearly exhibit both traits. Some scholars have explicitly acknowledged this duality.[57] Yet it remains unclear why some INGOs' actions seem to be more heavily dominated by competitive strategies than others, and what the consequences are. There are also many things that we simply do not know about INGOs. Whereas the international relations (IR) literature has sought to understand how INGOs shape politics and policy, and which organizations gain legitimacy and influence, many necessary prior questions about INGOs' decision-making remain both unasked and unanswered. Under what conditions do entrepreneurs create new INGOs? How do they choose where and on what to work? Our book explores these questions.

1.2 Recent Trends

To motivate this focus, we consider three important developments that pertain to INGOs since the end of the Cold War. These trends relate to INGO foundings, mission breadth, and geographic location. Previous IR scholarship on INGOs and global governance more generally has not adequately theorized – or even documented – these developments. This omission partially stems from the temporal focus of many canonical studies like *Activists Beyond Borders*, which examined INGOs in the 1980s and early 1990s, or even earlier. Our work updates these accounts by documenting and explaining later developments during the post-Cold War and particularly the post-9/11 period.[58] These years since the end of the Cold War have been characterized by an explosion of transnational advocacy, the opening up of international institutions to nonstate actors, and Western states' increased reliance on NGOs to implement their foreign policy initiatives.[59]

[57] See the review essay by Stroup and Wong (2016).
[58] See also Bloodgood and Pallas (2022) for a thoughtful consideration of more recent developments.
[59] Tarrow (2005); Tallberg et al. (2013); Dietrich (2021).

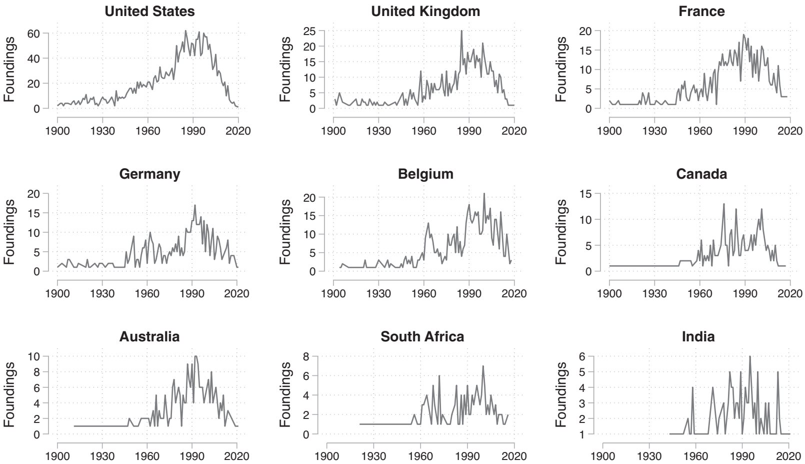


Figure 1.1 Number of INGO foundings, 1900–2022
Notes: These countries have among the most INGOs globally (see Table 1.1). The sources are the YIO (2023 electronic edition) and WINGO (Lall, 2023). The YIO appears to combine INGOs headquartered in both West and East Germany during the Cold War into the present-day "Germany" category.

The first development is the decline in INGO growth rates (Figure 1.1).[60] The figure highlights countries that are among the top twenty headquarters in terms of the total number of INGOs and includes countries from both the Global North and Global South. The data comes from the Yearbook of International Organizations (YIO), the most comprehensive data source on INGOs around the world.[61]

Figure 1.1 indicates that the INGO sector is no longer a growth industry in the countries that are home to the most INGOs. Whereas studies on the sector from the 1990s and early 2000s documented the

[60] For this figure and all others in this book, we use the graphic schemes developed by Bischof (2017).

[61] Union of International Associations (1953–2023). The YIO is also an important source of information on a variety of other organizations including IGOs, foundations, and networks. It has been frequently cited in the literature (e.g., Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Smith and Wiest, 2012; Smith et al., 2019). We acknowledge that it is subject to significant undercounting that may vary across countries. For the United States, we find substantial undercounting relative to US tax data, as discussed further in Bush, Hadden, and Pavlik (2024).

"explosion" of this organizational form,[62] little has been written to document or explain its decline since then. Given that some of the factors that are thought to have encouraged INGO growth in the late twentieth century remain present – including unmet needs in an interdependent world, IGOs that welcome civil society participation, and governments that want nongovernmental partners to help implement their foreign policies – this trend poses a puzzle for existing theory. The decline in new INGO foundings coexists alongside significant growth in new business foundings; in the United States, for example, the number of new business foundings has grown almost every year since 2015.[63]

In a second development, organizations with narrow missions have dominated recent growth in the INGO sector. We define mission specialists as organizations with missions that have a limited topical focus, geographic orientation, or both.[64] Around 70 percent of global INGOs in 1992 were specialists based on our coding of a sample of organizations from the YIO. By 2022, this figure increased to 80 percent, reflecting the fact that most groups founded after the end of the Cold War were specialists. As Sarah S. Stroup and Wendy H. Wong document, scholarly accounts of INGOs have generally focused on "leading" organizations, which tend to be large generalists that work globally on a range of issues.[65] But as specialists increasingly dominate INGO populations, examining the conditions under which INGO entrepreneurs choose this organizational strategy is equally important.[66]

Finally, INGOs have increasingly spread out to more countries over time, attempting to avoid saturated environments like the ones discussed in our Asian Tsunami example. Figure 1.2 displays the number of American INGOs that reported having organizational members in a given country in 1993 vs. 2013 based on data drawn from the

62 Boli and Thomas (1997, 177).
63 "How Many New Businesses Are Started Each Year? New Data Reveals the Answer," *Commerce Institute*. Available at https://shorturl.at/BFMRW (last accessed February 26, 2024).
64 Chapter 4 discusses how we conceptualize and measure mission breadth and presents additional original data to document trends in mission specialization among American INGOs.
65 Stroup and Wong (2017).
66 Schnable (2021).

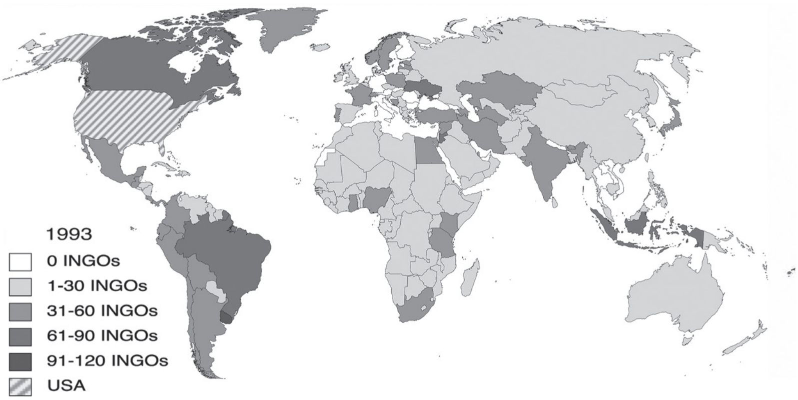
Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset's coding of the YIO.[67] The figure indicates that INGO presence became much denser in Eastern Europe, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa during this period. Past work has evaluated geographic biases in where INGOs choose to engage, taking up questions like which countries are most likely to be "named and shamed" for human rights violations, considering not only countries' human rights practices but also other political and economic characteristics.[68] But our over-time perspective reveals that INGO engagement is increasingly becoming geographically dispersed as INGOs are crowded out of more popular destinations.

Together, these three trends suggest there have been important changes in how INGOs operate in world politics. Our book will further explore these implications. For example, stagnant population growth may decrease innovation within INGO populations. Specialist organizations may be one avenue for innovation, but their narrow missions may constrain their flexibility and capacity to adapt to changing environments. Geographic dispersion may bring needed programming to underserved audiences, but it could be inappropriate if there is highly concentrated need. We reflect on these issues in the coming chapters.

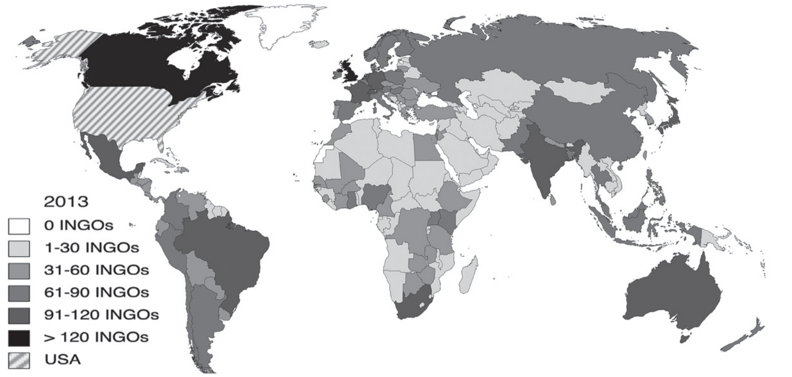
1.3 Argument and Approach

This book develops a theory to explore INGOs' strategic choices. The central concept in our theory is population density. *Density* refers to the number of INGOs within a *population*, which is a group of organizations that share common structures, patterns of activity, and normative orders within a geographic region or regulatory system.[69] These definitions draw on foundational work by sociologists Michael T. Hannan, John Freeman, and Glenn R. Carroll, who pioneered the study of trends within entire populations of organizations, from trade unions to newspapers to breweries.[70] Their approach is known as organizational (or population) ecology.

67 We rely on data on geographic locations collected from the YIO by Smith et al. (2019); 2013 is the most recent year included in this dataset. We discuss the data in more detail in Chapter 5.
68 Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers (2005); MacLean et al. (2015).
69 Hannan and Freeman (1977, 935).
70 Hannan and Freeman (1987); Hannan and Carroll (1992).



(a) 1993



(b) 2013

Figure 1.2 Number of American INGOs with members in a country, 1993 vs. 2013

Notes: The data is drawn from the Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset, which is based on a bi-yearly coding of the YIO. The number per country reflects whether an American INGO listed in the YIO reported having organizational members in that country.

We argue that the density of an organizational population determines how cooperative or competitive its member organizations are with each other. When a population is less dense, organizations are more likely to cooperate and work together to build influence or establish programming. But when a population is denser, organizations are more likely to view each other as threats in the fight to secure resources and influence. For many INGOs, the most important resource is often money, but media attention, quality staff, policy influence, autonomy, authority, and other intangibles are also relevant.

We use this theoretical framework to explain the puzzling trends outlined in Section 1.2. High levels of density deter new foundings and dissuade INGOs from working in certain global "hot spots" despite the considerable need. Density-induced competitive pressures ultimately make it more difficult for INGOs to survive. High levels of density affect different types of organizations in different ways. Even in a crowded organizational environment, for example, specialized organizations can find favorable niches by focusing on a unique issue, location, or approach. In all our analysis, we test our density-dependent approach against alternative explanations related to need, media attention, available resources, and civil society restrictions, among others.

Our empirical analysis assesses US-headquartered INGOs in particular depth. Table 1.1 shows the twenty countries with the most INGOs in the YIO, which together host 81 percent of all the INGOs in the YIO. Among the wealthy countries that dominate the landscape, the United States is by far the largest (and oldest) home of INGOs: It is home to 28 percent of all INGOs in the world. American INGOs may therefore be the "canaries in the coal mine" that foreshadow trends that are likely to emerge in other countries in the future as their INGO populations become increasingly dense.[71]

Focusing on American INGOs also strengthens our research design in two ways. First, country characteristics such as the level of democracy and integration into the international system likely shape INGO trends, and different countries have starkly different INGO regulations and resources.[72] By studying the United States, we can hold these

[71] Chapter 6 considers the generalizability of our findings to non-American contexts.
[72] Stroup (2012); Hanegraaff et al. (2015).

Table 1.1 ***Number of INGOs per country, twenty largest countries***

Country	Number of INGOs	% of Global INGOs
United States	3,384	28
United Kingdom	1,083	9
France	775	6
Belgium	691	6
Germany	591	5
Switzerland	432	4
Netherlands	369	3
Canada	365	3
Italy	346	3
Australia	330	3
Spain	240	2
Japan	220	2
South Africa	167	1
India	161	1
Sweden	138	1
Austria	138	1
Norway	102	1
South Korea	101	1
Denmark	98	1
Russia	94	1

Notes: The sources are the YIO (2023 electronic edition) and WINGO (Lall, 2023).

factors constant to examine the effects of population density, although doing so comes at a cost in terms of our ability to draw conclusions about the effects of density in other countries' INGO populations. Second, American INGOs constitute a distinct national market. They are the main recipients of US foreign assistance, and their procurement policy of "buying American" for overseas goods and services only loosened in 2012.[73] American foundations have historically provided most of their international giving to US-based nonprofits;[74] contributions to foreign nonprofits are not tax deductible, which strongly incentivizes individual support for domestically registered nonprofits.

[73] See 22 CFR §228 2012. The largest US Agency for International Development contractors and grantees remain American.
[74] Lawrence and Mukai (2010).

We test our theory using four types of original data. The first comes from new datasets on INGO creation, missions, and revenues that we constructed using the YIO and tax records and supplement with original coding based on INGOs' materials.[75] Using comprehensive or near-comprehensive data on INGO populations enables us to study real-world organizational outcomes on a larger scale than has previously been possible. Given data limitations, previous approaches to understanding INGOs have generally focused on a single organizational population (e.g., INGOs working in environmental conservation); researchers typically gather comprehensive data themselves or study the more prominent INGOs in that field.[76] Yet digital organizing tools have made it more feasible for INGOs with small staffs and budgets to reach relevant audiences,[77] which makes it especially important to include the full range of organizations in the analysis, which we do to the extent feasible. Our datasets are freely accessible to other researchers who may wish to use them to build on our research.[78]

We use data from the YIO and government registries, supplemented with information collected from the organizations themselves. Government databases offer the most complete coverage, since NGOs are usually required by law to register in them and must report certain financial information (e.g., their total annual revenue). For example, the US Internal Revenue Service requires all nonreligious 501(c)(3)s – the most common kind of US nonprofit organizations – with revenues over $50,000 to file tax returns, and this data is used to create a dataset hosted by the National Center for Charitable Statistics. Since the YIO and government registries offer little information on INGO activities and motivations, we integrate additional data to gain a deeper understanding of these organizations.[79]

[75] On different data sources, see Hadden and Bush (2021, 211–212) and Bloodgood, Stroup, and Wong (2023).

[76] See Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2019) and Stroup and Wong (2017), respectively.

[77] Hall, Schmitz, and Dedmon (2020, 159).

[78] To access the replication files for this book, see Bush and Hadden (2025b). The replication files can be used to reproduce all figures and tables in the book and cover both data processing and data analysis.

[79] The Appendix contains more details about our interview, survey, and focus group methods, including a discussion of the ethical issues that arose with our human subjects research.

The second type of data comes from case studies of the evolution of three influential and distinctive INGO populations – civil society and democracy, environmental conservation, and humanitarianism. The case studies illustrate how density shapes INGOs' choices and impacts in some settings where INGO performance matters the most. We focus on these INGO populations because they are substantively important, emphasized in the previous literature on INGOs, and vary on three theoretically relevant characteristics. First, conservation is a global commons problem, which might foster cooperation between INGOs, whereas civil society and democracy and humanitarianism are issues that primarily benefit people in areas where INGO activities take place. Second, the three sectors have different population characteristics. As we show in Chapter 3, conservation comprises a relatively small number of American INGOs and humanitarianism comprises a relatively large number, with civil society and democracy falling somewhere in between. We might expect cooperation to be more feasible in smaller populations.[80] Finally, the sectors have different resource profiles. Civil society and democracy INGOs rely more on state funding than those in the other two sectors, while humanitarian INGOs are unusually reliant on individual religious donors. Given these differences, if we find evidence of density dependence in all three cases, it will strengthen our causal claims.

Our case studies rely on a common methodology. We draw on a variety of qualitative materials, including published academic research, books and memoirs written by practitioners, published interviews, INGO publications (e.g., annual reports and websites), news sources, and our own interviews. We conducted fifty three interviews for this project and drew on relevant interviews we conducted for previous research projects. The interviews were generally semi-structured and lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. We sought to speak with individuals who have worked in a range of organizations, including the largest and most prominent INGOs – such as Amnesty International and Save the Children – as well as a randomly selected sample of smaller organizations, including some groups with no full-time staff members. In many cases, we spoke directly with the INGOs' founders and presidents; it was more difficult to reach such individuals in larger organizations,

[80] Olson (1965).

but there we still spoke to people in leadership roles (e.g., vice presidents, regional directors) who could shed considerable light on the organizations' strategies.

Our third data source is an original, large-scale survey of leaders at American INGOs. The survey probed attitudes among a larger sample (around 200 respondents) than could be included in our interviews, and its online and anonymous nature helped elicit truthful responses. The survey further enhances the study's internal validity by integrating experimental components designed to identify how density shapes INGO leaders' thinking about the scenarios they face in their work.[81] This is an important asset for our study, since many of the phenomena we are interested in – such as population density and funding – trend over time, making it difficult to engage in causal inference using observational data. By asking survey respondents to consider hypothetical INGO choice scenarios in which population characteristics (as well as other attributes) vary randomly, we can address that inferential problem.

The final type of data we collected comes from four focus groups we conducted with senior INGO practitioners. We included individuals from the issue areas in our case studies as well as other areas to gain a broader perspective. In the focus group discussions, we asked questions to validate our findings from our other forms of analysis that practitioners do indeed perceive themselves to be operating in highly dense environments. Asking participants to reflect on complex questions about INGO density, competition, innovation, and performance in a group setting reduces the cognitive burden on any one individual, which improves the quality of responses by allowing groups to brainstorm and discuss their answers.[82] Since many of these concepts have a meaningful intersubjective component, they are particularly appropriate to study using socially generated data that can register areas of agreement *and* dissent. Thus, the book's research strategy combines the benefits of analyses at different levels and using different methodologies.

81 On the usefulness of elite surveys in IR, see Dietrich, Hardt, and Swedlund (2021) and Kertzer and Renshon (2022).

82 Cyr (2019).

1.4 Contributions

The book's theory and findings make three important contributions. First, we help reconcile and deepen previously conflicting findings in the literature on INGOs, which has often depicted these actors as either sinners or saints. We explain how the extent of density in a given INGO population drives INGO behavior and encourages an emphasis on either cooperation or competition.

Early studies suggested that cooperation among these groups was common and noted how networks of INGOs led to progress on a variety of issues. Later studies emphasized competition between INGOs, linking it to poor performance and negative unintended consequences. We suggest that these different conclusions reflect authors' different temporal perspectives: Earlier studies observed cooperation during periods of lower density while later studies observed competition during periods of greater density. Our mixed-method longitudinal data gives us an unusually complete picture of INGO activity in the populations we study, which helps us test the observable implications of our theory.

To be clear, we are not the first to consider how population density influences INGO behavior. Many studies in a political economy tradition shed light on how INGOs respond strategically to their resource environment.[83] Though these studies offer a potential explanation for the stagnating growth rates and other changes we observe – INGO competition – they cannot explain early periods of development within the INGO sector, when we demonstrate that actors engaged in mutual support and collaboration to expand the resources and legitimacy of the population as a whole. Thus, political economy explanations miss an important component of the population life cycle. In this emphasis, our book joins a broader turn in the study of international organizations to study change over time.[84]

In a second contribution, we develop a rich theory about how density affects organizational outcomes *across* domains of INGO activity. Although there are important exceptions,[85] most previous studies of

[83] Bob (2005); Cooley and Ron (2002); Prakash and Gugerty (2010).
[84] Gray (2018, 2020); Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2020, 2021); Debre and Dijkstra (2021).
[85] For example, Stroup and Wong (2017) and Mitchell, Schmitz, and van Vijfeijken (2020).

INGOs focus on their activities in a single issue area, like human rights or the environment, or a handful of issue areas. Although these studies have generated very valuable insights, they cannot track some of the broader dynamics in INGOs that our more macro-level perspective enables. Our theory's insights could be usefully extended to other forms of organizations that matter for IR scholars interested in global governance, including domestic NGOs, IGOs and their emanations, and transnational regulatory organizations. If these populations are – like populations of INGOs – becoming crowded, then they may be more competitive, which has important implications for the future of global governance.

Finally, the population dynamics we identify should shape how IR scholars study the effects of INGOs on service provision and policy change. This topic has been a rich area of research within the literature on INGOs. For example, the number of health INGOs per capita has been found to be positively associated with government spending on health.[86] Likewise, countries with more INGOs are more likely to adopt national human rights institutions and be shamed for their human rights abuses.[87] Our perspective suggests that the true effect of INGOs may well be nonlinear. Because adding INGOs to an already dense population increases competition, the presence of more INGOs may not always lead to better services or more policy change. From a policy perspective, encouraging coordination among existing INGOs – as opposed to simply increasing their number – may be an important intervention to improve the performance of mature and highly dense populations.

1.5 Plan of the Book

In Chapter 2, we present our theory of how population density affects INGOs. We begin by describing how they address market failures and government failures, and how changing international norms lend them legitimacy as an organizational form. Next, we develop a theoretical framework that assumes INGOs seek to survive, both to make progress in achieving their objectives and as an end in itself. Given INGOs' preference for survival, we then consider how their leaders

[86] Murdie and Hicks (2013).
[87] Meernik et al. (2012); Kim (2013).

make important decisions in environments that are increasingly dense with other INGOs. We elucidate how density affects three decisions – whether to create a new organization, how specialized to make that organization's mission, and where to work globally.

Chapter 3 addresses the relationship between population density and INGO foundings. Using detailed data on American INGO foundings, we show that increases in density were initially associated with the founding of new INGOs, as these organizations helped each other survive and contributed to the legitimacy of the overall population. Eventually, however, increases in density began to deter new foundings, as the competition for scarce resources discouraged would-be INGO entrepreneurs. These relationships hold when we control for other variables that might be expected to encourage INGO foundings, such as pure resource availability and the amount of attention already devoted to an INGO's issue area. We also draw on a qualitative case study of INGO foundings within the civil society and democracy population to illustrate how density shapes INGO entrepreneurs' views about when is a good time to found a new organization. Finally, in this chapter, we analyze INGO deaths, showing that INGOs are less likely to survive in dense populations. Although an INGO's death might indicate that the organization has fulfilled its mission and is no longer needed, it much more commonly indicates that it has not been able to successfully navigate its resource environment.

Chapter 4 explores how population density shapes INGOs' missions. We distinguish between INGOs that are generalists and specialists in their missions, and find that only about 20 percent of American INGOs are generalists.[88] This pattern is surprising in light of previous IR research on IGOs, which has documented a tendency toward generalism and expansion. Indeed, generalist INGOs have the most authority and influence in world politics; they act as gatekeepers and secure the bulk of the available resources within their issue area. They also have greater flexibility than specialists to respond to shocks to the political or resource environment. Yet it is much more difficult for generalist INGOs to survive in a dense population because they must compete with each other for the market "middle." By contrast,

[88] This figure is similar to the proportion of generalists among *global* (i.e., not just American) INGOs as of 2022 noted earlier.

specialist organizations can more easily find niches for their work even in crowded conditions. As our theory anticipates, density and concentration predict the likelihood that an organization will specialize. In the largest population of American INGOs, those that work on humanitarianism, our case study reveals that there are still opportunities for new specialist INGOs but that the environment is much more competitive for generalists. Organizations that pursue niche missions can still survive in an environment that remains dominated by large, generalist organizations like CARE and Médicins San Frontières.

In Chapter 5, we demonstrate that density also affects organizations' choices about where to work globally. Conventional wisdom suggests that INGOs might flock to countries that have the greatest need, a welcoming political environment, and available resources to support their work. We advance a different perspective: When INGO density increases in a country, it initially attracts INGOs and then eventually discourages them. Our analysis of American INGOs' global activities support our claims. It draws on two data sources: (1) an original dataset that contains detailed information on contemporary organizations' activities at a snapshot in time (2020) and (2) an existing dataset of their activities with less detailed information but better temporal coverage of the post-Cold War period (1993–2013). Drawing on our qualitative research, this chapter also establishes that our argument does a good job of explaining how environmental conservation INGOs decide where to open offices and conduct their activities.

Chapter 6 concludes by discussing our findings' implications for the future of transnational social action. As we write this book, many INGO and aid practitioners are actively debating the future of the INGO, considering issues such as whether INGOs are still capable of addressing contemporary global problems and whether a movement toward localization might be more appropriate. As debates about the efficacy and legitimacy of INGOs continue, our conclusion asks: Will other actors – such as local NGOs, for-profit firms, or direct giving campaigns – eventually replace this organizational form? While there are indeed signs of this type of transition, we believe INGOs are here to stay. Going forward, continued (and, in some cases, increasing) population density will play an important role in shaping INGOs' actions and performance. We suggest areas for future research on transnational advocacy and global governance, in particular by looking in more depth at non-American INGOs, examining variation across the issue areas on which INGOs work, and exploring INGO effectiveness. We also offer suggestions for individuals and funders seeking to productively engage with INGOs to promote innovation, spur coordination, and better address global challenges.

2 *A Theory of INGO Populations*

The number and scope of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) grew remarkably in the second half of the twentieth century, both globally and in the United States. This expansion generated many positive developments, including the provision of aid and services to needy populations, the global diffusion of human rights norms, and the creation of systems to monitor whether states and corporations keep their pledges on issues like climate change and child labor. Many observers thought the global growth of INGOs would continue apace in the twenty-first century. In 1999, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan anticipated that: "The 21st Century will be an era of NGOs [nongovernmental organizations]."[1]

In some ways, this positive prediction was accurate. In the twenty-first century, the global INGO population has grown larger and better resourced. Some of the world's largest INGOs – like Save the Children,[2] the Nature Conservancy,[3] and Americares[4] – had annual expenditures of over $1 billion in 2022, greater than the GDP of some

[1] Quoted in UN-ECE Operational Activities, "Entrepreneurial NGOs and Their Role in Entrepreneurship Development," 2007. Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20070311005246/http://www.unece.org/indust/sme/ngo.htm (last accessed July 28, 2023).

[2] Save the Children, "Annual Report 2022." Available at www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/annual-report/annual-report/2022-annual-report-brighter-futures-for-children-a-year-of-impact-v73123.pdf (last accessed September 7, 2023).

[3] The Nature Conservancy, "2022 Annual Report." Available at www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/TNC_AR_2022.pdf (last accessed September 7, 2023).

[4] Americares, "Amended Form 990 for the Year Ended June 30, 2022, Public Disclosure Copy." Available at www.americares.org/wp-content/uploads/Americares-Foundation_Amended-F990_FY22_PD.pdf (last accessed September 7, 2023).

countries.[5] INGOs' access to international institutions has increased,[6] and INGOs have expanded their memberships to more parts of the world (see Figure 1.2). Whereas INGOs have historically often been portrayed as scrappy "Davids" up against the "Goliaths" of business and government interests, they are now often major players to be reckoned with in their issue areas, wielding significant experience, resources, and reputations in global governance.

But the picture is not all rosy. The rate of INGO founding has declined dramatically in recent years, and new organizations tend to have very specialized missions. As a result, many people worry that existing organizations are no longer innovating enough or reaching the people who need their help most.[7] Moreover, as the population of INGOs has grown larger and more dispersed, many countries have adopted laws in the past two decades that make it difficult for them to operate – for example by preventing them from registering overseas and providing funding or working collaboratively with domestic NGOs.[8]

Taken together, these trends suggest that we have entered a new era of INGO politics that is potentially more restricted and critical of their activities. How do INGOs operate in this new context? How do they make strategic choices in environments with many (often large) competing organizations? This chapter builds a general theory about how INGOs operate in world politics in this new era. We focus on how dynamics within INGO populations – particularly density – shape INGOs' strategic decisions.

We present our argument in three parts. First, we discuss what international NGOs are and why they exist. INGOs – defined both in terms of their nonprofit character and geographic breadth – respond to demand for social action that is unmet by the market and government. During the twentieth century, their organizational form came to be viewed as increasingly legitimate.

Second, we argue that INGOs are motivated to survive to advance their ultimate goals related to social change. Survival can be an end in

[5] World Bank, "GDP (current USD)." Available at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?most_recent_value_desc=false (last accessed September 7, 2023).
[6] Tallberg et al. (2013).
[7] Bush and Hadden (2019).
[8] Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2016); Chaudhry (2022).

and of itself, but it is also a crucial means of obtaining other goals, such as promoting democracy or protecting an endangered species. INGOs must determine how best to achieve their goal(s) within the INGO population in which they work.

Third, we make the case that INGOs' ideal strategies depend on the structure of the organizational population in which they operate. We draw particular attention to the role of population density (how many INGOs there are in a particular country and/or issue area) and concentration (the share of revenues controlled by the largest INGOs in the sector). We argue that changes in these aspects of the population environment cause INGO entrepreneurs to make predictably different decisions about whether to found an organization, how specialized their mission should be, and where to locate their work globally. These decisions have significant implications for their ability to address social problems. In this chapter, we generate hypotheses about founding, mission breadth, and geographic locations, and then test them in Chapters 3–5.

2.1 The Range of International NGOs

Many types of organizations are "international NGOs." Some are household names, like Amnesty International, Oxfam, and Médecins Sans Frontières (or Doctors Without Borders). Others are shoestring operations, with just one or a handful of staff members working out of their homes. They engage in a variety of activities including advocacy, service provision, monitoring, and enforcement.[9] Many INGOs regrant funding to other organizations, and some do that as their primary task. Despite these vast differences, all INGOs exist to address social problems using an organizational model that shares some common features.

2.1.1 Defining INGOs

The UN, which helped popularize the NGO concept in 1945 by using it in its Charter,[10] defines an NGO as "any non-profit, voluntary citizens'

[9] Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Sharman (2021).
[10] Davies (2014, 3).

group which is organized on a local, national, or international level."[11] Building on this definition, INGOs as we conceptualize them share two characteristics: they are *nongovernmental* and *international*.

First, nongovernmental organizations are, as their name suggests, distinct from governments. Past research has used a variety of criteria to determine which organizations qualify as "nongovernmental" (or "voluntary"), including institutional separation from the state and self-governance.[12] Yet many of these benchmarks are difficult to operationalize due to ambiguities that arise when, for example, an organization implements government contracts as one of its primary activities, as is commonly the case for NGOs.

Following other scholars of INGOs,[13] we define NGOs as entities that have legal nonprofit status in their country of origin. In the United States, the book's primary focus, the nonprofit designation comes from the tax code. When using US tax records, for example, we examine US-headquartered organizations that hold "501(c)(3)" status as tax-exempt charitable organizations (a reference to the relevant section of the Internal Revenue Code), similar to other researchers.[14] This category includes public charities, private foundations, and private operating foundations that do not support political candidates; they are subject to limitations on their lobbying activities. When relying on US tax records in this way, we exclude some potentially relevant nonprofits: Small groups that do not meet the revenue threshold ($50,000) at which point entities are required to file taxes; and larger groups that do not have a 501(c)(3) designation, such as 501(c)(4) organizations, which work on social-welfare causes but are generally not eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions from donors. Yet these types of organizations are (typically) sufficiently different in terms of their structures, activities, resource pools, and normative orders that it is reasonable to consider them to be part of different organizational populations. For example, 501(c)(4)s may have some overlapping activities

11 United Nations, Department of Public Information/NGO Relations, "About Us." Available at https://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/content/about-us-0 (last accessed July 28, 2017).
12 Salamon and Anheier (1992, 135).
13 See the discussion in Stroup and Wong (2016, 139).
14 For example, Mitchell and Schmitz (2014, 492) and Mitchell (2014, 72).

and resource pools with 501(c)(3)s, but they generally do substantially more lobbying and do not receive government grants.

Furthermore, we acknowledge that this legal definition of "nongovernmental" is thin, as it includes some organizations that collaborate extensively with governments. As we will see in Chapter 3, for example, many of the most prominent American organizations engaged in civil society and democracy promotion, such as the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute, have relied heavily (if not almost exclusively) on US government funding. Yet our definition of nongovernmental has two important advantages: (1) it is tractable within a large, global study, and (2) it has theoretical relevance. Indeed, most countries have legal provisions for designating organizations as nonprofit.[15] Organizations with legal nonprofit status are generally required to operate within a "nondistribution constraint," which prohibits them from "distributing the net earnings, if any, to individuals who exercise control over them."[16] NGOs can (and do) pay compensation to individuals involved in leadership activities. But in nonprofits, net earnings must be used to finance the organization and its mission.

Second, INGOs are international.[17] Researchers use different methods to distinguish between domestic and international groups, such as classifying the content of their missions. We define "international" organizations as those with significant activities outside the country in which they are based.[18] This definition includes organizations that are involved in only one other country (e.g., Together for Haiti, which brings development aid from the United States to Haiti)[19] as well as those that are global in their operations (e.g., Save the Children, which had operations in 116 countries in 2023).[20] We exclude purely domestic NGOs from our study, even though they may have connections

15 Salamon and Anheier (1992, 133).
16 Hansmann (1980, 838).
17 "International" NGOs are sometimes called "transnational" NGOs in the literature, and the two terms are usually used interchangeably. "International" NGO is the main term of art and what we use.
18 This approach follows Murdie and Davis (2012, 177) and Murdie (2014a, 1).
19 See Together for Haiti, "Our Story." Available at https://togetherforhaiti.org/our-story (last accessed June 9, 2023).
20 Save the Children, "Where We Work." Available at www.savethechildren.net/where-we-work (last accessed June 9, 2023).

with international actors and in some cases receive most of their funding from overseas.[21] If private foundations are legally registered as nonprofits and have significant operations abroad, they fall into our INGO category. For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) is registered as a 501(c)(3) organization and is headquartered in Seattle, but it has offices in seven other countries at the time of writing.[22] However, our primary data sources (rosters of INGOs and tax records, as reviewed in Chapter 1) vary in how comprehensively they include private foundations.

2.1.2 INGOs' Advantages

INGOs offer at least three advantages over other organizational forms. First, an economic explanation of NGOs focuses on how nonprofits address market failures.[23] Nonprofits are typically more abundant in areas of activity that are harder to contract (i.e., when it is more difficult to stipulate specific, measurable terms that an actor must fulfill).[24] Nonprofits – by virtue of the nondistribution constraint – are traditionally viewed as more trustworthy when it comes to undertaking these activities. Contracting problems are especially acute for many socially oriented *international* activities.[25] Supporters who seek to create social change abroad are rarely able to directly observe the activities of a contracted organization working in a distant location; they must trust, for example, that CARE really is bringing clean water and food to communities in Somalia. Language and cultural barriers exacerbate the distance between supporters and beneficiaries. Given these uncertainties, the reputational advantages of nonprofits may be particularly valuable.

Second, nonprofits address needs that governments may overlook.[26] For example, an individual or foundation may want to support family planning or climate change adaptation overseas in ways that governments and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have declined to

21 Brass (2016, 78).
22 See Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, "Offices." Available at www.gatesfoundation.org/about/offices (last accessed June 13, 2023).
23 Anheier and Ben-Ner (2003); Prakash and Gugerty (2010).
24 For example, Oster (1995).
25 Martens et al. (2002); Easterly (2006).
26 Hansmann (1987).

pursue. Although such funders may have the option to work with domestic NGO partners in a foreign country, INGOs often have better capacity and provide information about their finances and activities that is more accessible to (and easily interpreted by) overseas supporters.[27] Moreover, in the United States, donating to US-based INGOs (but not overseas NGOs) may offer tax advantages.

Third, changes during the second half of the twentieth century have enhanced INGOs' legitimacy in solving market and government failures. For example, IGOs increasingly welcome civil society representatives – often INGOs – as exemplified by Kofi Annan's comment above.[28] INGOs may seem "lighter on their feet" than lumbering bureaucratic agencies,[29] as well as more authoritative than for-profit firms. There has been a recent "backlash" against civil society in some domestic contexts, potentially indicating decreased INGO legitimacy in countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, and India.[30] Nevertheless, the prevailing ideology in many countries (including the United States) is neoliberalism, which embraces the privatization of public services. This doctrine encourages relying on private actors such as INGOs to implement foreign policy objectives, such as using them to deliver foreign aid.[31] A related perspective on why governments turn to INGOs is that nonstate actors increasingly help states exercise power given prevailing norms.[32]

These three (perceived) advantages of INGOs are as applicable today as they were at the end of the Cold War. Market and government failures have arguably intensified in global issue areas such as climate change and pandemic preparedness. Yet as discussed in Chapter 1, fewer new INGOs have been founded over the last thirty years. The plateau in the growth of new INGOs began in the 1990s (recall Figure 1.1), before the era of INGO restrictions after the Color

[27] Oelberger, Lecy, and Shachter (2020).
[28] Boli and Thomas (1999); Reimann (2006).
[29] Keck and Sikkink (1998, 8).
[30] Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2016); Bakke, Mitchell, and Smidt (2020); Bromley, Schofer, and Longhofer (2020); Glasius, Schalk, and De Lange (2020); Chaudhry (2022).
[31] Dietrich (2016). This is also consistent with Jesse Lecy and Daniel Van Slyke's finding that government funding supports domestic human service nonprofit density in the United States. See Lecy and Slyke (2013).
[32] Sending and Neumann (2006).

Revolutions (2003–2005).[33] To explain the puzzle of stagnating INGO growth in the United States and other countries – as well as other important trends in INGO politics – we need to examine INGO population dynamics.

2.2 INGOs and the Fight for Survival

INGOs exist because some individuals want to achieve (what they believe is) an international social good – the conservation of natural resources, the eradication of a global disease, support for democracy or human rights, humanitarian disaster relief, and so on. Like all organizations, INGOs need to survive to achieve their goals. Many (if not most) nascent entrepreneurs are unsuccessful at founding lasting organizations[34]; the most frequent challenges are securing funding and managing the organization's day-to-day operations.[35] INGO death is fairly common in our data; as we discuss in Chapter 3, about one-third of American INGOs have died since the end of the Cold War according to US tax records. Given the significant threat of organizational collapse, successful INGOs must remain focused on how to grow and perpetuate themselves within an environment that is often competitive and uncertain.[36]

Organizational survival requires securing various types of resources. The most important material resource for INGOs is usually funding. INGOs adopt different funding models, with resources potentially coming from many sources, including governments, IGOs, foundations and other INGOs, businesses, individual donors, and revenue on investments. Some INGOs also raise funds by charging fees for services, goods, or membership. Although systematic data on the sources of INGO funding is unavailable,[37] existing research suggests that INGOs typically surrender some degree of autonomy to their donors in

[33] Glasius, Schalk, and De Lange (2020, 459).
[34] Yang and Aldrich (2017).
[35] Andersson (2019).
[36] Prakash and Gugerty (2010, 7).
[37] In the United States, nonprofit organizations are required to report total revenues to the Internal Revenue Service, but not the source of those revenues. Although some INGOs do make their sources of revenue available by funder type in their annual reports, this type of reporting is highly inconsistent across organizations.

exchange for securing their material support. For example, a Bridgespan study of 144 large American nonprofits in 2003 stated that "most of the nonprofits that we studied report that their programs or operations are restricted as a result of their dominant funding source," providing the example of Population Services International as an organization that "must conduct activities that … satisfy the interests of important funders."[38] In the Bridgespan study, only 6 percent of the nonprofits had individuals as their primary revenue source, with government as by far the most important funder.[39] Similarly, the global development consulting group Humentum did a survey of eighty one development NGOs based in ten countries that were grantees of large foundations, finding that only 5 percent of these organizations' revenues came from individuals.[40] This same research indicated that the average level of unrestricted income for these groups was 17 percent, with a median of 9 percent, suggesting that most groups are donor-constrained.[41]

It is common to critique the "nonprofit industrial complex" for surrendering its autonomy to the interest of powerful (state) donors.[42] But even INGOs with donation-based funding models are strategically limited by their need to seek resources. For example, Amnesty International is a well-known INGO that advertises that it is "fully independent in setting its strategic goals and priorities" due to securing the vast majority of its resources from small, individual donors.[43] But Amnesty International has relied on government and foundation funding when in financial crisis, suggesting that such a model may be open to negotiation during hard times.[44] And Amnesty International

[38] Foster and Fine (2007).
[39] Ibid.
[40] See Humentum, "Breaking the Starvation Cycle," 2022. Available at https://humentum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Humentum-ACR-Research-Report-FINAL.pdf (last accessed February 1, 2024).
[41] See Humentum, "Breaking the Starvation Cycle," 2022, page 5. Available at https://humentum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Humentum-ACR-Research-Report-FINAL.pdf (last accessed February 1, 2024).
[42] For example, INCITE! (2017).
[43] Amnesty International, 2024. "Our Finances." Available at www.amnesty.org/en/about-us/finances-and-pay/ (last accessed February 1, 2024).
[44] Srivastava (2022).

is still constrained by the preferences of its members and individual donors. For example, Amnesty was slow to move toward the adoption of "full spectrum" human rights because its members did not support this strategic shift. As Wendy H. Wong writes, "More and more competitors in the business of human rights [have] moved to the frontiers of advocacy, innovating their agendas in much quicker ways than Amnesty can because of its formal inclusion of membership in decision-making."[45]

A small group of INGOs – particularly foundations – has such large endowments that funding concerns may seem irrelevant to their survival calculus. For instance, the Ford Foundation, registered as a 501(c)(3) organization in the United States, supports international human rights programs and has a multi-billion dollar endowment.[46] Yet it still carefully seeks to protect its endowment to promote its longevity and reach; for example, Ford closed its offices in Russia and Vietnam in 2008 after its endowment lost one-third of its value during the 2007–2008 global financial crisis.[47] The BMGF is an unusual case in which its founders have committed the organization to spending all of its assets within twenty years of the founders' deaths.[48]

Many other resources in addition to funding and autonomy are important for INGOs. Some of the more tangible ones include media coverage, policy connections, partnerships with other INGOs, quality staff, volunteers, individual participants, and access to overseas countries. The availability of these resources is also often marked by competition and uncertainty. For example, Greenpeace International is a well-known, well-funded organization that relies primarily on individual donations to support its work, granting the organization and its national affiliates unusual levels of autonomy. But Greenpeace also

45 Wong (2012, 85).

46 Wong, Levi, and Deutsch (2017); Gonzalez-Ocantos and Álvaro Morcillo Laiz (2023).

47 "Ford Foundation to Close Offices in Russia, Vietnam," *Philanthropy News Digest*, May 1, 2009. Available at https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/ford-foundation-to-close-offices-in-russia-vietnam (last accessed June 13, 2023).

48 Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, "Foundation Trust." Available at www.gatesfoundation.org/about/financials/foundation-trust (last accessed June 13, 2023).

extensively relies on resources such as its ability to mobilize individuals and gain public attention for its campaigns, often competing with other groups. As Nina Hall describes, internal analysis at Greenpeace after the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit indicated that the group felt it was no longer competitive in online mobilization spaces due to the rise of new digital advocacy groups.[49] This conclusion prompted the organization to subsequently scale up its use of web-based tools.[50]

Less tangible qualities are also essential for INGOs' survival. For example, reputation management is key for INGOs; they pursue various strategies, including subjecting themselves to external verification and forming accountability clubs.[51] Having credibility allows an INGO to establish itself as an expert on a given issue and become an authority to which other actors in world politics defer.[52] These qualities make INGOs more attractive to potential funders, partners, and other supporters, which helps them secure more material resources. The importance of a good reputation is why recent legitimacy crises, like Oxfam's sexual exploitation scandals in Haiti in 2018[53] and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2021,[54] are so worrisome for INGO leaders.[55] According to the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, which surveyed the public in twenty eight countries, only 53 percent of respondents across twenty eight countries reported trust in NGOs, roughly the same as those who reported trust in business.[56]

49 Hall (2022, 53).
50 See also Mobilisation Lab, "Our Roots." Available at https://mobilisationlab.org/about/our-roots/ (last accessed January 10, 2024).
51 Gourevitch and Lake (2012); Gent et al. (2015).
52 Green (2013).
53 Courtney Columbus, "After Oxfam's Sex Scandal: Shocking Revelations, a Scramble for Solutions," Goats and Soda, *National Public Radio*, March 16, 2018. Available at www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/03/16/591191365/after-oxfams-sex-scandal-shocking-revelations-a-scramble-for-solutions (last accessed December 22, 2022).
54 James Lansdale, "Oxfam: UK Halts Funding Over New Sexual Exploitation Claims," BBC, April 7, 2021. Available at www.bbc.com/news/health-56670162 (last accessed December 22, 2022).
55 Deloffre and Schmitz (2019); Scurlock, Dolšak, and Prakash (2020).
56 Edelman, "2018 Edelman Trust Barometer," page 5. Available at www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2018-10/2018_Edelman_Trust_Barometer_Global_Report_FEB.pdf (last accessed March 5, 2023).

Pursuing survival over other goals may encourage an organization to seek "vanilla victories"[57] or "tame" programs rather than more ambitious social change.[58] Many high-level INGO practitioners we interviewed for this book bemoaned the extent of competition in their issue area and its effect on programming. Someone in the peace and security field remarked, for example, "Funding cycles and the cut-throat nature of funding actually can divide organizations and distract people from being able to do their jobs, at least for us internally."[59]

However, most (though certainly not all) INGO practitioners do not believe their focus on survival conflicts with their pursuit of social goods. According to a study that conducted 152 in-depth interviews with top staff at INGOs, for example, "Funding concerns are highly salient to [I]NGO leaders, but they primarily constrain the distribution and magnitude of principled activity rather than crowd out or undermine it."[60] And some practitioners view the need to fight for survival as motivating their organizations to work more effectively toward their missions. As an executive at a humanitarian INGO explained to us in a focus group:

> [T]here's definitely competition ... but I would categorize it as friendly competition or I was using the word "frenemies," because we compete for the same pools of funding, sometimes we win, sometimes we lose, but we also work in consortia ... I see this as positive because it does mean that you have to be on the cutting edge, you have to not rest in your laurels, you have to constantly be bringing the best thinking, the best approach, the best minds to the table, so I'm in favor.[61]

Several other participants in the same focus group concurred. An executive at a peace and security INGO said, "I agree by and large; it [competition] can create efficiencies, generate ... new ideas."[62]

In summary, INGO survival is an end in and of itself, but it is also a core strategy for achieving an international social good through a nonprofit organization.[63] The theory that we develop in what follows

57 Stroup and Wong (2017).
58 Bush (2015).
59 Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 7, 2022.
60 Mitchell and Schmitz (2014, 489).
61 Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 13, 2022.
62 Ibid.
63 Prakash and Gugerty (2010, 7).

thus takes INGO survival as a core motivator that can help explain key decisions about when to enter the market, how much to specialize, and where to work. We acknowledge that, of course, not all INGOs are equally committed to organizational survival in practice. For example, the founder of a conservation INGO with whom we spoke for this project observed, "I think the best thing for us – and for a lot of international NGOs – would be to put ourselves out of business ... Eventually the international community should depart."[64] Yet this viewpoint (consistent with the interviewee's remarks) normally concerns the long term, during which INGO leaders ultimately hope to solve the difficult social problems on which their organizations work. In the short and medium terms, however, INGOs generally focus on survival. Most of the deaths of seemingly successful INGOs of which we are aware (e.g., the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights and the Academy for Educational Development [later just known as AED]) are related to financial mismanagement or other scandals.[65]

2.3 How the Population Environment Shapes INGOs

To understand INGO behavior in the context of an underlying quest to survive, we next consider the environments in which INGOs operate. We theorize how population density as well as other population-level dynamics shape INGOs' choices. We use this theoretical framework to develop hypotheses about three key decisions made by INGO entrepreneurs and leaders – whether to found new organizations, how to develop their mission statements, and where to work. These choices have received limited attention in the extensive literature on INGOs,

[64] Interview, Johanna Barry, Founder, Galapagos Conservancy, by telephone, September 28, 2016.

[65] On the former, see Claire Bigg, "Helsinki Federation Shuts Down After Fraud Scandal," Radio Free Europe, December 12, 2007. Available at www.rferl.org/a/1079257.html (last accessed July 28, 2023). On AED, see Ken Delianian, "U.S. Bans Contractor from Further Aid Programs," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 2010. Available at www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-dec-08-la-fg-pakistan-fraud-charges-20101209-story.html (last accessed July 6, 2023).

but questions of organizational emergence, structure, and strategy are crucial for understanding the role of INGOs in world politics.[66]

2.3.1 Theorizing the Population Environment

Following other research, we define an organizational *population* as the set of groups that share common structures, patterns of activity, and normative orders within a particular geographic region or regulatory system.[67] This concept draws on sociological research on organizational ecologies, which studies trends in entire populations of organizations. This tradition employs ideas from biology that were first developed to understand changes over time in populations of species. Although the field of international relations (IR) has only recently recognized the importance of organizational populations,[68] the population concept overlaps with more familiar IR concepts used in taxonomies of organizations. For example, similar to industries, organizational populations typically provide a common type of good or service, broadly defined.[69] Populations also share a common normative order, similar to how John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald define a social movement industry as "all of the [social movement organizations] with relatively similar goals"[70] or how Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink define a transnational advocacy networks as "organized to promote causes, principled ideas, and norms."[71] And similar to fields, which "constitute a recognized area of institutional life," organizational populations are social arenas.[72]

Defining INGO Populations

We use two criteria to classify organizations into specific populations: geography and issue area. All the populations we study comprise

66 Prakash and Gugerty (2010, 4).
67 Hannan and Freeman (1977, 935).
68 Valuable contributions to the nascent literature include Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2015), Abbott, Green, and Keohane (2016), Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2020), Green and Hadden (2021), Morin (2020), and Lake (2021).
69 Meyer and Scott (1983); DiMaggio and Anheier (1990).
70 McCarthy and Zald (1977, 1213).
71 Keck and Sikkink (1998, 8).
72 DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 148). On defining fields, see also Fligstein and McAdam (2012) and Sending (2015).

INGOs. "INGO" is a meta-category for different substantive populations of organizations that share a relatively similar structure. Within this meta-category, we might, for example, seek to understand populations such as American environmental conservation INGOs or French humanitarian INGOs.

To elaborate, first, we define populations based on the geographic region in which they are located. In Chapters 3–5, we delineate populations by the country in which the organization is headquartered, focusing on those that are headquartered in the United States. Although the actions of INGOs from one country may influence those from another (and often do so by design), there are stark national differences in INGO practices that are related to cross-national variation in regulations, resources, and political opportunities.[73] As discussed in Chapter 1, much of the book's analysis focuses on American INGOs which constitute a distinct market. The push to "decolonize" INGOs, which prompted Oxfam to move its headquarters from the United Kingdom to Kenya in 2017, may start to decouple organizations' headquarters from their resource bases. Yet at present, this example remains more of an outlier than the norm.

In Chapter 5, which examines organizations' geographic siting decisions, we also define INGO populations based on the country in which they work. In doing so, we acknowledge that INGOs often share common structures, patterns of activity, and normative orders when they are co-located in the same national environment. For example, all American INGOs that work in Bangladesh could also be considered as a population in our analysis.

Second, when possible, we also define populations based on the main issues on which organizations work. Many such issue areas are clear. Mercy Corps, for example, is commonly recognized as a humanitarian INGO, and Greenpeace as an environmental one. Organizations may also be classified as part of different populations because they take opposing stances on the same issue, such as to promote the expansion of legal rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people or to oppose them.[74] But there is room for reasonable dispute in

73 Stroup (2012).
74 Ayoub and Stoeckl (2024a).

classifying issue areas,[75] including because organizations sometimes work on more than one issue area.[76] There is also potential for organizations to move in and out of issue areas strategically. Because the definitions of what constitutes "similar" products and services are socially constructed, different readers may arrive at slightly different classifications than those we deploy in this book.

For example, US-headquartered organizations that work internationally to advance the liberal principles of human rights and democracy mostly belong to distinct populations.[77] The human rights INGO population includes leading groups such as Amnesty International USA and Human Rights Watch, whereas the civil society and democracy one includes groups such as the Carter Center and Freedom House. All of these groups arguably share some common goals and provide some similar services. For example, groups in both populations report on abuses related to democracy and human rights, which are closely related ideals dating back to at least the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which encompasses democratic elections. Despite these shared tactics and values, practitioners commonly identify with either the "human rights" or the "democracy promotion" organizational population on the basis of how they think NGOs should relate to the state.

Our empirical chapters use several approaches to define issue areas. For our quantitative analyses in Chapters 3–5, we generally classify organizations according to their main issue area as given in government records and INGO registries. In our other sections, we use practitioners' self-classifications as given in surveys and interviews.[78]

Population Density and Other Characteristics

A key feature of the population environment is *density*, which we define as the number of organizations within a population.[79] This is the traditional definition used by organizational ecologists, and

75 Fyall, Moore, and Gugerty (2018); Plummer, Hughes, and Smith (2020); Santamarina, Lecy, and van Holm (2023).
76 Hadden (2014); Barnett (2018).
77 Bush and Stroup (2023).
78 The Online Appendix contains more information about these coding decisions with respect to American INGOs. See Bush and Hadden (2025a).
79 Hannan and Carroll (1992, 5).

it has gained acceptance within IR among some scholars studying population-level patterns among NGOs and IGOs.[80]

An alternative approach to conceptualizing density is to look at the "extent and complexity of governance activities within a population of organizations," divided by "the resources available for that population."[81] This approach makes particular sense for studying organizations such as large, formal IGOs, which are much fewer in number than INGOs and may take up a substantial portion of a population's resource and issue space. For example, the UN now covers a broader range of activities within "international peace and security" than it did when it was founded, meaning it has taken on more governance activities even though it has remained a single organization.

Although we see the merits of this alternative conceptualization of density, we adopt the traditional definition. It has the advantage of being more amenable to precise measurement given the potential for ambiguity when identifying the extent and complexity of activities for a population of organizations. More importantly, we believe it offers the most appropriate theoretical fit given our population definition, which generally focuses on INGOs headquartered in a single country that work in a particular issue area. The more finite set of structures and patterns of activity that characterize INGOs (especially those with geographic and issue area commonalities) relative to institutions in global governance writ large, such as the World Bank or UN, increases our confidence that the number of organizations captures density in a meaningful way.

Environments that are densely populated with organizations – including INGOs, but also trade unions, newspapers, breweries, and so on.[82] – are different from those that are less populated. During periods of low population density, organizations depend on each other to convince audiences that a new organizational form, such as an INGO, is a legitimate and effective way to achieve a common goal. Organizations can easily position themselves near the market center, which tends to be resource rich. By contrast, periods of high population density are

[80] Cooley and Ron (2002); Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2015); Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2020); Green and Hadden (2021).
[81] Abbott, Green, and Keohane (2016, 258).
[82] Hannan and Carroll (1992).

characterized by competition. When there are many organizations, further increases in density tend to contribute only a little to the overall field's benefits but intensify the fight for resources. This increase in competition eventually slows the growth in the population and creates incentives to seek less crowded resource spaces. Given that INGOs may have different funding models (as discussed above), some may question whether increasing INGO density always brings more competition. Indeed, large and successful INGOs often specialize in one type of funding, which may limit their direct competition with other groups going after different sources of revenue.[83] INGOs can potentially try to partition the market – reducing some direct resource competition – by evolving different forms of resource acquisition (e.g., by some competing for government grants and others going after individual donations). But we argue that these large organizations are still often in direct competition for other types of resources, including media coverage, policy connections, staff, volunteers, and authority. This competition may constrain their choices about what issues to work on, how to do so, and where to do so. And even if large, established organizations engage in effective resource partitioning, new entrepreneurs will still have to compete with the incumbents, with important implications for their decisions about whether to found and how to do so.

Each population has a "tipping point" at which it makes sense to treat other organizations as threats as opposed to potential partners. Once past this tipping point, analysis commonly refers to environments as being "saturated" in that new organizations typically cannot enter without detracting from the resources available to existing groups.[84] The point of saturation can occur for at least two reasons. First, the scale of existing INGO activity may be sufficient to address the level of need. In the example of the Asian Tsunami, the scale of INGO activity was greater than the need of beneficiaries in some areas, pointing to the fact that the population was saturated.

Second, the number of INGOs in a population may fully absorb all available (and potentially available) resources for that sector. This dynamic sometimes occurs due to natural population growth, but it also can happen because of major donors shifting their priorities.

83 Foster and Fine (2007).
84 Carroll and Khessina (2005).

For example, the Open Society Foundations (OSF), announced a major restructuring in 2021 (followed by another in 2023) that involved a more exclusive focus on particular countries and issue areas; the shift left grantees in issue areas like global health and refugees surprised to no longer be eligible (given pressing need) and adrift.[85] Illustrating the size of the shift, news reports indicate that OSF "set aside an enormous $400 million for what amounted to severance payments to organizations around the world, and more than 150 foundation employees took buyouts as part of the restructuring."[86] Government donors can also shift their priority countries and issues in ways that disrupt the population environment and create a tipping point. Other resources in addition to funding are also often in flux; media and policy attention to health, for example, crowded out many issues during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our study also explores how *concentration* affects INGOs. Following the approach of the US Economic Census, we conceptualize concentrated populations as ones in which a large portion of resources are controlled by a small number of actors.[87] They also tend to be more competitive and are thus prone to similar dynamics as dense populations. But certain types of organizations are well-suited to survive in them. As we discuss further, specialist organizations are often successful at identifying favorable niches in which they can secure resources despite the overall dominance of a small number of organizations.

2.3.2 Crowded Out: How Population Density Affects INGOs

Our theoretical framework aims to explain three significant decisions: (1) whether to found an INGO, (2) how much to specialize, and (3) where to work globally.

[85] Thalia Beaty, "George Soros' Open Society Foundations Intend to Cut Programs in Europe, Worrying Grantees," *Associated Press*, August 25, 2023. Available at https://apnews.com/article/george-soros-open-society-cuts-osf-d876ac44a899389e704f5482fa323da5 (last accessed August 27, 2023).

[86] Nicholas Kulish, "George Soros Is Making Changes at His Foundation While He Still Can," *The New York Times*, September 21, 2021. Available at www.nytimes.com/2021/09/12/business/george-soros-philanthropy-open-society-foundation.html (last accessed June 14, 2023).

[87] See US Census Bureau. 2024. "Concentration Ratio." Available at https://data.census.gov/all?q=Concentration+Ratio (last accessed March 20, 2024).

Foundings

In deciding whether to found an INGO, an entrepreneur must consider the likelihood that a new organization will be able to survive. We expect the availability of resources (both material and other) to be of particular importance. Yet it is not simply the total amount of resources available that matters, but also how many other organizations a new INGO must compete with for those resources. In other words, density shapes the likelihood of survival and thus decisions about whether to found a new INGO.

The extent of mutual support within a population tends to increase with density but at a decreasing rate. In low-density populations, existing INGOs will accept or even welcome new INGOs, which creates more propitious conditions for new organizations to be founded. Examples of cooperative behavior include providing funding to a new INGO, partnering with it on a program, welcoming it into an existing network, and deferring to or recognizing its authority. When there are only a few organizations, creating a new one benefits the field as a whole; thus existing organizations are more likely to accept – if not welcome – new entrants. Yet in high-density environments, existing INGOs fight the entry of new INGOs, which discourages INGO foundings. Competitive behaviors toward new INGOs are roughly the mirror image of cooperative ones; they include seeking out the same funding sources, refusing to partner with them, excluding them from relevant networks, policing the population's boundary to exclude new issues, and criticizing or otherwise attempting to delegitimize new INGOs.

Competition tends to grow with population density, but at an increasing rate. Our theory therefore assumes that, all else equal, a rise in density boosts competition. Occasionally, a new organization will bring new resources with it (thus the competition does not immediately intensify despite the increase in density). Yet eventually we expect the population to evolve to reflect its new carrying capacity and for the competition to return to previous levels. When there are few organizations in a population, the founding of a new organization creates additional competitive pressures, but these are less intense than when the field is already saturated with organizations that perform similar functions and seek similar resources. Combining these two general tendencies suggests the hypothesis – which we test in Chapter 3 – that foundings will initially increase with organizational density, and then decrease with density, along an inverted u-shaped curve. Potential INGO entrepreneurs anticipate the likelihood of supportive vs. competitive behaviors by drawing on their prior experience in a field (if any) and researching the population environment, and then decide accordingly whether to found a new group. In dense environments, new INGO entrepreneurs can be crowded out.

Although it is difficult to identify examples of organizations that were never created, we suspect that these dynamics apply widely across sectors of INGO activity. And as we discuss in Chapter 6, we expect that density in the INGO sector will push would-be founders away from entrepreneurship in many cases and to form new types of organizations in other cases. For example, GiveDirectly, a prominent direct giving organization, was created to address some of the perceived deficiencies associated with the INGO organizational form.[88] As co-founder Michael Faye stated in an interview,

> There's a chain, from governments to international agencies, to country offices, to local NGOs, which fund, design and implement programmes [sic]. As you move through that process there's less and less freedom in decision-making, and less and less money available. There's still a need for NGOs . . . But I'm arguing that we should spend less time and money on guesswork about what the poor need and just let them make the decisions themselves.[89]

Mission Breadth

INGO leaders must also define their organization's mission. Since nonprofit organizations do not generate economic returns for shareholders like a for-profit firm, their mission statements define the criteria that internal and external audiences use to evaluate their performance. Mission statements are thus an important arena in which INGOs seek to establish their authority.[90] They also delineate the pool of potential resources for which the organization might compete.

[88] Give Directly, "How to Understand GiveDirectly's Financials," November 7, 2022. Available at www.givedirectly.org/financials/ (last accessed June 8, 2023).

[89] "Interview: Michael Faye of GiveDirectly," *Alliance Magazine*, September 5, 2017. Available at www.alliancemagazine.org/interview/interview-michael-faye-givedirectly/ (last accessed April 5, 2024).

[90] Shibaike et al. (2023).

Mission statements can be either broad or narrow in their scope. In our conceptualization, a generalist mission is broad in both the types of programming it envisions and an organization's geographic reach. Having a broad mission can help reach the widest possible audience, attract the largest range of funders, and make an INGO more likely to achieve a position of high status within its population. At the same time, specialization can allow INGOs to establish their expertise in a particular issue. Recognizing these dynamics, the IR literature on mission creep and specialization in global governance theorizes these phenomena as resulting from *intra*organizational dynamics, such as how autonomous an organization is or whether it is dominated by professionals.[91]

We shift our theoretical focus to the *inter*organizational dynamics that support specialization and are created by the INGO population environment. In dense populations, mission specialism will be more advantageous than mission generalism. Specialists are more likely to be able to locate an underserved niche in which they can survive and thrive by avoiding direct competition. Thus, new INGOs in dense populations have incentives to specialize and are often crowded out of the market center.

Likewise, in concentrated populations, specialized INGOs do not threaten dominant actors' positions or resources – and may even support them by providing useful services or complementary tactics. This phenomenon is known as resource partitioning, whereby specialist organizations coexist happily within the same overall concentrated population as generalists by offering distinctive approaches or products and therefore relying on separate resources.[92] New generalist INGOs are more threatening to existing generalist INGOs and may experience entry deterrence and competition as a result.[93] Of course, new specialist INGOs will pose a risk to existing specialists if they threaten their turfs and can therefore experience the same types of competition. Yet INGO entrepreneurs can anticipate these responses from existing specialist INGOs and select an appropriate organizational strategy. In Chapter 4, we test the resulting hypotheses that both

[91] Barnett and Finnemore (2004); Johnson (2014).
[92] Carroll (1985); Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2019); Morin (2020).
[93] Hannan and Freeman (1977).

density and concentration increase the likelihood of new organizations having specialized missions.

The American global health INGO population exhibits these dynamics. The generalist mission of the INGO PATH ("to advance health equity through innovation and partnerships") allowed it to substantially expand its operations but in a way that was organic to the mission when the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation arrived on the scene in 2000 with substantial new resources.[94] PATH ultimately became one of the foundation's largest beneficiaries and expanded its work dramatically on malaria, HIV/AIDS, maternal health, and other priority areas for the BMGF.[95] A more specialized global health INGO working on diseases of less interest to BMGF would not have been able to take advantage of this new funding source. Thus, PATH benefited from its generalist mission in the aftermath of a dramatic and unexpected shift in the resource environment for global health INGOs.

Geographic Location

Finally, INGO entrepreneurs must decide where in the world they will work. Having a physical presence in a country is often needed to affect political outcomes and helps INGOs provide necessary services and diffuse norms in support of their missions.[96]

Large generalist INGOs could (in principle and resources permitting) have offices wherever there is a need for their programs. In contrast, small grassroots INGOs may often choose to work in only one country. For example, many such organizations in the United States are created by returning Peace Corps volunteers who wish to continue providing assistance to a community in which they worked.[97] But other organizations' geographic foci are not determined from the start, since a mission to promote conservation or eradicate a tropical disease could be pursued in many settings. INGO leaders must therefore decide where to concentrate their efforts, since even large organizations cannot maintain operations everywhere in the world. Grassroots INGOs

[94] See PATH, "Mission and Strategy." Available at www.path.org/about/mission-and-strategy/ (last accessed June 15, 2023).

[95] Harman (2016, 353–354).

[96] For example, Murdie and Bhasin (2011); Meernik et al. (2012); Murdie and Hicks (2013); Dörfler and Heinzel (2023).

[97] Schnable (2021, 54).

may eventually confront these choices too, such as when considering whether to expand or shift their locations based on an assessment of where there is a need for their work or how to respond to changing political and economic circumstances.

Similar to our argument about foundings, we expect low-density country settings to attract INGOs. In such settings, INGOs cooperate with each other in various ways, and initial increases in density can even make such cooperation more likely. For example, international staff can help each other by sharing information about local laws and customs or where to live. Initial increases in the number of expatriate INGO staffers promote the flow of information and facilitate the creation of institutions and events where such learning can occur. In some contexts, there are very few local professionals perceived to be available to staff INGO projects. The presence of more INGOs in a country draws the attention of the local workforce and may encourage more people to develop the skills needed to work at INGOs. For these reasons, initial increases in density encourage more INGOs to work in a country.

However, countries can eventually become saturated with INGOs, creating competition over financial resources, staff, and even office space and housing. The Asian Tsunami case that opened Chapter 1 is a good example of some of the negative dynamics that can occur in such an environment even when funding is plentiful. Since many government and other funding sources are earmarked for particular countries, funding competition may be especially fierce when too many INGOs are competing for the same grants and contracts. Thus, when overall density is relatively high, further increases in INGO density in a country will discourage organizations from working there, crowding out some INGOs. We thus expect an inverted u-shaped relationship between density and geographic choice, and test this hypothesis in Chapter 5.

Some observers have cited Haiti as an example of this dynamic, calling it a "republic of NGOs."[98] Indeed, an environment that is already saturated with INGOs is a less desirable place for organizations to work given the high levels of competition that ensue, even if that country's needs are great (as is the case with Haiti) and its environment is

[98] Kristoff and Panarelli (2010).

attractive to INGOs in other ways. We recognize that high levels of density may not be enough to deter all types of INGOs from beginning work in a country; for example, humanitarian INGOs feel strong pressure to work in countries experiencing natural disasters even if they are already crowded. Our argument is that such environments will, however, be more competitive and thus additional INGOs will be less likely to choose to work there, all else equal.

2.4 Conclusion

The theoretical approach developed in this chapter advances our understanding of INGOs in four ways. First, our theory applies to INGOs *generally* and without a specific focus on INGO tactics, issue areas, or size.[99] By considering INGOs as an organizational form, we develop theory to explain surprising empirical patterns that previous scholars have not noted – for example that the founding of new INGOs has stagnated.

Second, we offer a theory of INGO *choices*. Despite a strong interest in INGOs, much of the IR literature has concentrated on understanding their *effects* on other actors. For example, previous scholars have sought to demonstrate that – or explore the conditions under which – INGOs affect state policies, social practices, international norms, global attention, and so on.[100] We join other scholars who have shifted the focus to INGOs' decisions and behaviors, such as their decisions about how and when to network with other organizations and which issues to adopt.[101] However, we explore new dependent variables – INGO foundings, mission scope, and geographic location – that are theoretically prior to most of the research questions explored in previous studies. These outcomes are important in their own right, as INGOs cannot affect other political outcomes if they do not exist or work on a particular topic in a particular location.

99 These foci can yield important insights but have also been cited as impediments to knowledge accumulation in the literature on INGOs. See Brass et al. (2018).

100 Keck and Sikkink (1998); Clark (2001); Price (2003); Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers (2005); Wong (2012); Murdie (2014a).

101 Carpenter (2007); Murdie (2014b); Stroup (2012); Hadden and Jasny (2018); Jurkovich (2020).

Third, our theory shifts the focus to the INGO *population*. IR studies have generally neglected populations as units of analysis, instead focusing on advocacy networks,[102] campaigns,[103] and large INGOs.[104] Part of the reluctance to study populations may be the difficulty of acquiring population-level data. Yet it is possible to build appropriate population-level datasets, as we show in subsequent chapters. Our theory draws attention to how density-dependent processes may operate among other actors in global governance. Past work has identified growth in many populations, including IGOs' emanations, international financial institutions, regional and subnational organizations, informal IGOs, private transnational regulatory organizations, industry coalitions, and private security organizations.[105] If these populations are becoming crowded, then they may be more competitive, which has implications for the future of global governance. For example, Phillip Y. Lipscy argues that the multilateral development space has become highly competitive due to the presence of a large number of actors, leading to calls for reform at the World Bank.[106] Our theory can thus contribute to broader research on population dynamics within global governance.[107]

Finally, our focus on INGO populations builds on and melds naturally with insights from organizational ecology, which is increasingly applied to IR. We integrate these insights about the importance of density as well as other population traits like concentration into a theory that seeks to explain variation in INGO choices. We theorize that INGO preferences are neither uniformly cooperative nor competitive; instead, these approaches are both *strategies* derived from INGOs' overriding motivation to survive, which interacts with strategic environments that sometimes favor mutual support and adjustment and at other times favor competition. Our approach thus helps reconcile previously conflicting findings in the literature on INGOs over whether cooperation or competition is more common.

102 Keck and Sikkink (1998); Carpenter (2011); Murdie (2014b).
103 Price (1998); Busby (2010).
104 Barnett (2005); Stroup (2012); Wong (2012); Stroup and Wong (2016).
105 Haufler (2010); Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel (2010); Green (2013); Vabulas and Snidal (2013); Johnson (2014); Avant (2016); Clark (2024).
106 Lipscy (2017).
107 See also Finnemore (2014, 223).

3 *After the INGO Explosion*

In 2006, a young American entrepreneur named Blake Mycoskie took time off work to vacation in Argentina. He visited a local cafe and met another American who was volunteering on a shoe drive. Mycoskie traveled for several days with the volunteer and witnessed the intense poverty that caused children to go barefoot. As he recounts in his memoir:

> I knew somewhere in the back of my mind that poor children around the world often went barefoot, but now, for the first time, I saw the real effects of being shoeless: the blisters, the sores, the infections – all the result of children not being able to protect their young feet from the ground.[1]

This experience inspired Mycoskie into action. He decided to create a new type of for-profit firm: What we now call "social entrepreneurship." The new business – TOMS Shoes – was based on an innovative one-to-one model in which, for every pair of shoes sold, the company donated a pair to a child in need. TOMS became enormously popular in the 2000s and 2010s, spawning many similar businesses combining profit and a social mission. Although Mycoskie's model was criticized for failing to address the root causes of poverty, Cotopaxi founder Davis Smith (who similarly adopted a social enterprise model for his outdoor gear company) credited him with "usher[ing] in the age of social entrepreneurship" as a viable business model.[2]

The story of TOMS is interesting to us because international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) – not firms – have traditionally been the main channel through which entrepreneurs have sought to

[1] Mycoskie (2011, 5).

[2] Knowledge at Wharton, "The One-for-one Business Model: Avoiding Unintended Consequences," February 15, 2015. Available at https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/one-one-business-model-social-impact-avoiding-unintended-consequences/ (last accessed July 19, 2023).

address social issues abroad. The best available information suggests that there were at least 10,397 active INGOs around the world in 2022, up from 5,739 in 1990 and 1,098 in 1950.[3] Today, there is no major issue area in world politics in which INGOs are not active.

But despite the size and importance of the INGO sector, Mycoskie decided *not* to found a new INGO, even though he was an entrepreneurship-minded individual seeking to help the world. There were (and still are) other American INGOs working in Argentina, indicating that it was a viable location to work, and Mycoskie had already made connections with local volunteers in the nonprofit space. Even though he described his motivations as primarily charitable, instead of founding an INGO, Mycoskie channeled his desire to help children living in poverty toward a different type of organization. Why? As Mycoskie explains it:

> My first thought was to start my own shoe-based charity, but instead of soliciting shoe donations, I would ask friends and family to donate money to buy the right type of shoes for these children on a regular basis. But, of course, this arrangement would last only as long as I could find donors ... Why not come up with a solution that guaranteed a constant flow of shoes, rather than being dependent on kind people making donations? In other words, maybe the solution was in entrepreneurship, not charity.[4]

In short, his primary concern was the lack of sustainable resources available to new organizations in the nonprofit space. And this concern was so significant that he decided to launch a new type of firm with an untested business model to try to achieve his social welfare goals.

Mycoskie acknowledges that many people thought he was crazy for starting TOMS Shoes.[5] But – as this book will show – his choices reflect a broader trend starting in the mid-2000s *away* from creating international nonprofits. In some cases, would-be founders are pursuing alternative organizational forms like Mycoskie, but in other cases, they are likely not starting any organizations at all. As we document in this book, new INGO foundings in the United States and many other

[3] Calculated based on data from the Yearbook of International Organizations (YIO) and WINGO (Lall, 2023), discussed in more detail further and in Chapter 1.

[4] Mycoskie (2011, 5–6)

[5] Ibid. (19).

countries have declined since the heyday of the 1990s. But there is still a great deal of unmet social need, and the available resources have not decreased overall. How do we explain this puzzling decline in new foundings?

This chapter explores that question as it pertains to American INGOs. Our theory emphasizes that competition and population density drive entrepreneurs' decisions about whether to found international nonprofits. This approach helps us understand broader trends such as why many potential INGO founders (like Mycoskie) are turning away from creating new INGOs, why existing INGOs are failing at higher rates, and why new types of organizations like "B-Corps" (for-profit firms that are certified for "social and environmental performance") might be challenging INGOs' dominance in some areas.

The chapter begins by discussing the paucity of prior research on this topic and briefly recapitulating our theory from Chapter 2 as it applies to INGO foundings. We then test our argument in two ways. First, we use data drawn from tax records on American INGOs that were founded in the three decades after the end of the Cold War to establish that there is a curvilinear relationship between population density and foundings. Second, we present a qualitative case study of civil society and democracy INGOs, drawing on memoirs, document analysis, and interviews with INGO founders and long-time practitioners. The case study uses process tracing to demonstrate how the extent of mutual support vs. competition shifts in a population as density increases, which provides additional support for our hypothesized causal mechanism. Finally, the chapter concludes by extending our argument about INGO foundings to INGO *deaths*. We find that density has a curvilinear relationship with both INGO entry and exit.

3.1 The Importance of INGO Foundings

INGOs are central to contemporary global governance. They often take on roles that states are unwilling or unable to fill. Yet, INGOs did not always play substantial roles as advocates, service providers, monitors, and enforcers in world politics. Their number and influence dramatically expanded during the twentieth century.[6] INGO growth

[6] Mathews (1997); Keck and Sikkink (1998, 11).

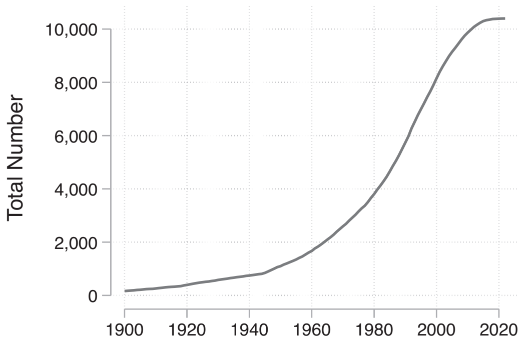


Figure 3.1 The total number of INGOs in the world, 1900–2022
Notes: The sources are the Yearbook of International Organizations (2023 electronic edition) and WINGO. See Union of International Associations (1953–2023) and Lall (2023).

was particularly rapid in the 1980s and 1990s, when shifting geopolitics, technological changes, and new international norms stimulated foundings.[7] This wave of INGO growth is not the first in history, but it is the largest.[8]

The first generation of international relations (IR) scholarship on INGOs demonstrated how they spread new norms and cooperated to address global problems.[9] For example, Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink described how the growing activity of networked INGOs influenced states' environmental and human rights policies. Their path-breaking study emphasized the functional advantages of transnational advocacy networks, which they characterized as being "lighter on their feet" than more hierarchical modes of organization.[10] This research roughly coincided with an intense period of INGO growth in the 1980s and 1990s (see Figure 3.1).[11]

Figure 3.1 also indicates that INGO growth slowed in the twenty-first century and has now plateaued. The annual growth rate peaked at 5 percent in 1992 (with a 1990s average of 4 percent) and dropped

7 Boli and Thomas (1999); Reimann (2006).
8 Davies (2014).
9 Wapner (1995); Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999); Price (2003).
10 Keck and Sikkink (1998, 8).
11 Union of International Associations (1953–2023).

to less than 0.1 percent by 2022 (with a 2010s average of 0.5 percent).[12] As a staff member from Save the Children explained to us, "I think if you're in the US and you're thinking about founding an NGO [non-governmental organization], I would say ask around if the world really needs another NGO or if your intelligence and your resources can be used maybe in a different way ... I don't think it's a growth industry."[13]

The stagnation in INGO foundings in the United States (see Figure 1.1) and globally (see Figure 3.1) has significant domestic and international implications. For example, as growth rates have declined, INGOs have also aged. Most INGOs created in the heyday of the 1990s have already celebrated their thirtieth birthday. And since organizational aging is often associated with bureaucratization and decreasing innovation,[14] this trend may well alter how INGOs operate in world politics. This chapter also demonstrates that decreased foundings have occurred alongside increased organizational mortality. Moreover, stagnation in growth rates in a given population is often associated with opportunities for challengers to emerge,[15] a dynamic that is suggested by the TOMS example and discussed further in Chapter 6.

3.2 Prior Research on INGO Creation

The IR literature on INGOs has proposed little theory or evidence on the causes of INGO foundings. Scholars in other disciplines have been more attentive to this question. For instance, sociologists have examined how country characteristics such as the level of economic development make the creation of INGOs more or less likely.[16] However, these insights are less relevant to our research question, since we seek to understand overtime variation *within a country* in INGO foundings, and the level of economic development in a country usually changes slowly. Meanwhile, scholars of social entrepreneurship have explored how individuals' traits influence their intention to

12 Calculated based on data in Union of International Associations (1953–2023).
13 Interview, David Barth, Save the Children, December 9, 2021 by Zoom.
14 On bureaucratization, see Bush (2015).
15 Abbott, Green, and Keohane (2016).
16 Boli and Thomas (1999).

engage in social entrepreneurship, but have not typically connected individual-level factors to real-world organizational outcomes.[17] In addition, public administration scholars consider how government funding affects the founding of nonprofit organizations writ large.[18] This research yields important insights that we use to investigate INGO foundings.

The silence within IR is surprising, since INGOs must be created before they can affect world politics, for better or worse. An important exception is research on how the international normative environment has encouraged NGO growth,[19] which has generally focused on the first half of the curve (i.e., the rise) illustrated in Figure 3.1.

More generally, IR scholars have considered three sets of factors that shape INGO behavior, which we extend to consider the drivers of INGO foundings. First, media attention may indicate or stimulate demand for INGO foundings. Previous research has established that multiple factors influence media attention to social problems such as human rights violations, but that such attention nevertheless reflects objective conditions.[20] Increased attention and "problem pressure" may stimulate both external support for and entrepreneurial interest in starting INGOs. Media attention can boost public awareness and encourage supportive public opinion – and create a larger pool of potential INGO founders with an interest in a cause. Would-be founders may also believe it will be easier to secure funding, members, and policy influence under such conditions.[21]

Second, government resources and policy attention may indicate or stimulate demand for INGO foundings. Government resources and policy attention influence INGO behavior in myriad ways.[22] In the United States, for example, aid agencies have increasingly channeled aid via INGOs and domestic NGOs – as opposed to giving it directly to governments – due to the belief that nongovernmental actors are better able to deliver aid in some contexts.[23] The resulting increase in

[17] Saebi, Foss, and Linder (2018).
[18] Lecy and Slyke (2013).
[19] Berkovitch (1999); Reimann (2006).
[20] Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers (2005).
[21] Bob (2005).
[22] Stroup (2012); Lecy and Slyke (2013); Bloodgood and Tremblay-Boire (2017).
[23] Stanger (2009); Dietrich (2016, 66).

demand for INGOs' services may stimulate the creation of organizations. Policy attention to a given issue may also wax or wane depending on political shifts and current events. For example, we might expect more civil society and democracy INGOs to be founded during periods when policymakers are more engaged in the issue area, such as during the presidency of George W. Bush in the United States.

Third, international norms may encourage INGO foundings by promoting the legitimacy of this type of organization and supporting the spread of particular norms on which entrepreneurs focus. As noted earlier, Kim D. Reimann observed the emergence of a pro-NGO norm within powerful Western states and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) during the 1980s and 1990s.[24] This changing normative environment created new ideas about the appropriateness of INGOs as well as new opportunities for policy influence. In tandem, scholars working in the world society tradition have argued that international models of behavior guide domestic action.[25] For example, Ann Hironaka argues that the development of the global environmental system, and especially IGOs working in this area, encouraged the growth of environmental INGOs.[26] In sum, both perspectives suggest that when international norms are more supportive, entrepreneurs will decide to found more INGOs.

But extending this line of work might lead to different predictions in the twenty-first century. The international system is arguably less supportive now of INGO foundings, which might explain the trends in Figures 1.1 and 3.1. States have engaged in both violent and nonviolent forms of crackdown on international and domestic NGOs.[27] Crackdowns have increased dramatically during the twenty-first century and been accompanied by the rise of global counter-norms that call into question the legitimacy of the INGO form that liberal democratic states promoted in the twentieth century.[28] These shifts may have caused would-be founders to doubt that creating a new INGO can generate social change.

[24] Reimann (2006, 59).
[25] Boli and Thomas (1999); Tsutsui and Wotipka (2004).
[26] Hironaka (2014).
[27] Chaudhry (2022). See also Christensen and Weinstein (2013); Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2015, 2016); Bakke, Mitchell, and Smidt (2020); Bromley, Schofer, and Longhofer (2020); and Glasius, Schalk, and De Lange (2020).
[28] Cooley and Nexon (2020, 140–144).

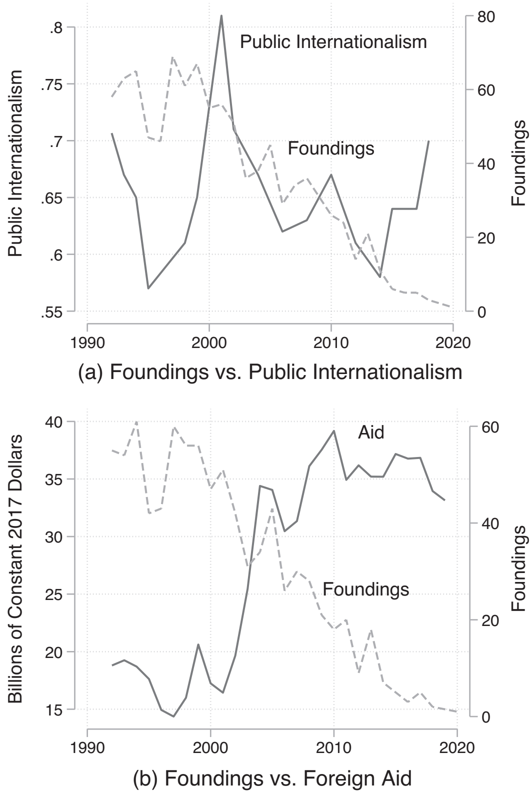


Figure 3.2 The number of INGO foundings per year, United States, 1992–2020.

Notes: The sources are the Yearbook of International Organizations (2023 electronic edition), WINGO (Lall, 2023), Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, East Asia Institute, Harvard University, et al. (2022), and the US Agency for International Development Greenbook

Existing theory cannot fully explain the patterns we observe for the foundings of American INGOs from 1992 to 2020 (Figure 3.2). Similar to Figure 3.1, which plots INGOs headquartered in *all* countries, Figure 3.2 shows that foundings of American INGOs peaked around 2000 and then sharply declined. To offer a preliminary examination of alternative explanations, Figure 3.2a depicts the percentage of Americans who think the United States should take “an active part in international affairs" based on longitudinal public opinion surveys.[29] This figure indicates that public support for international engagement (solid line) has fluctuated over time in a way that does not correspond to INGO foundings (dashed line), especially in the early and late years in the graph. Figure 3.2b visualizes foundings alongside the US foreign aid by year,[30] showing that – contrary to what previous theories would expect – the available resources increased dramatically around the same time that INGO foundings began to decline. Finally, we note that INGO foundings began to decline in 2000, which is when pro-NGO norms were firmly established but before anti-NGO laws began to take off globally,[31] which challenges an exclusively norm-based perspective.

3.3 How Density Affects INGO Foundings

Our approach emphasizes the importance of population density as a driver of INGO foundings. As discussed in Chapter 2, this perspective integrates insights from organizational ecology into a political economy model of INGOs. We conceptualize density as the number of organizations in the population of American INGOs in a given issue area.[32]

Our work builds on the INGO political economy approach of Alexander Cooley and James Ron, who maintain that organizations become increasingly competitive and insecure in dense environments, leading to dysfunctional programming.[33] But whereas their model implies that every new INGO introduces competition into the population, we argue that the effect of density varies over the life cycle of the

29 This figure displays results for the question, "Do you think it would be best for the future of this country if we take an active part in world affairs, or if we stayed out of world affairs?" The results are interpolated for some years. See Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, East Asia Institute, Harvard University, et al. (2022).

30 By "foreign aid," we refer to foreign economic assistance. The source is the US Agency for International Development, US Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook), 2023. Available at https://data.usaid.gov/Administration-and-Oversight/U-S-Overseas-Loans-and-Grants-Greenbook-Data/7cnw-pw8v/about_data (last accessed February 23, 2024).

31 Bakke, Mitchell, and Smidt (2020); Bromley, Schofer, and Longhofer (2020); Glasius, Schalk, and De Lange (2020).

32 Carroll and Hannan (1989); Cooley and Ron (2002); Lecy and Slyke (2013).

33 Cooley and Ron (2002).

population. In the early stages of population growth, new INGOs often work together to build the legitimacy of their field and promote other new entrants. The competitive pressures introduced by new foundings thus come later, once a population has reached saturation. According to our proposed life-cycle approach, increases in density do not always lead to decreases in INGO foundings.

Based on this logic, the extent of mutual support within a population tends to increase monotonically with density, but at a *decreasing* rate. When there are only a few organizations in a population, the creation of a new organization increases the benefits to the field as a whole, making organizations likely to support one another. For example, an initial wave of foundings can convince various audiences that a new organizational form, such as an INGO, is an acceptable and effective way to achieve some common goal. But when there are already many organizations in a population, a new organization contributes only a little to the overall field's benefits, making organizations less likely to support one another. Therefore, competition tends to increase monotonically with density, but at an *increasing* rate. When there are few organizations in a population, the founding of a new organization creates some additional competition, but not as much as when the field is already saturated with organizations that perform similar functions and seek similar resources. Combining these two general tendencies suggests that foundings will initially increase with organizational density, and *then* decrease as density rises further.

This model implies that INGO entrepreneurs face predictably different conditions depending on the density of the field they are considering entering, which Figure 3.3 summarizes. At lower levels of density, the beneficial effects of mutual support will prevail and favor foundings in a population. For example, INGO entrepreneurs may receive helpful advice and guidance from others in the field; such actions may be understood as a form of cooperation, defined as when INGOs make mutual adjustments in their activities to accommodate each other.[34] They will also likely face less funding competition. Anticipating these responses from existing INGOs, new organizations are more likely to be created. Founders during these periods often reflect on the spirit of common endeavor they share with other INGOs.

[34] Abbott, Green, and Keohane (2016, 263).

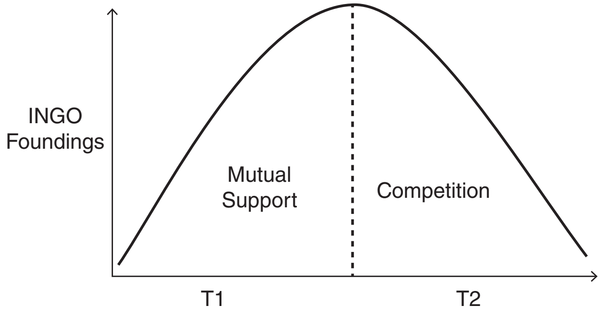


Figure 3.3 How environmental conditions influence INGO foundings
Notes: The likelihood of INGO foundings varies over time and depends on the degree of mutual support (which dominates during time period 1 (T1)) and the extent of competition among members of a population (which dominates during time period 2 (T2)).

For example, Aryeh Neier, one of the co-founders of what would become Human Rights Watch, later reflected on the supportive environment in the late 1970s and 1980s when his organization – as well as other prominent American human rights INGOs, including the Committee to Protect Journalists, Physicians for Human Rights, and what would become Human Rights First and Global Rights – was founded. He said, "A characteristic that distinguishes [these groups] was that those active in it ha[d] a strong sense of belonging to a global movement."[35]

But at higher levels of density, the benefits of mutual support are weaker and the competition for funding and other resources is fiercer. INGO entrepreneurs may be perceived as threats, be discouraged from entering the field, and have a harder time acquiring the initial support and guidance from peers needed to sustain a new INGO. Given these expected responses from existing INGOs, INGO entrepreneurs are more likely to stay out. This theoretical logic is echoed in the observation of practitioners from the Bridgespan nonprofit consulting agency that "timing can have a major influence over a nonprofit's ability to raise money and grow."[36] And founders we spoke to for this book also commented on the lack of support from other American INGOs when they created organizations during periods of

[35] Neier (2013, 9).
[36] Foster and Fine (2007).

substantial density. For example, the founder of Sekolo, an American global health INGO that achieved tax-exempt status in 2004, described the hostile reception she encountered from potential allies:

> All of them were basically like, "We do our thing. If you want to do our thing, you can come and work with us. We're not going to work with you to a compromise between your thing and our thing." At the time, I was really frustrated because I was coming with expertise, some funding, and a willingness to work.[37]

For a variety of reasons both internal and external, the organization ceased its operations in the United States about a decade later.[38]

Our argument's recognition of the importance of competition falls within the political economy tradition. It departs in its emphasis on the life cycle of organizational populations, and especially its claim that a rise in density does not necessarily discourage the creation of new INGOs. Indeed, we expect the effects of density – and therefore the extent of organizational insecurity and competitive pressure – to vary predictably over time. This insight allows us to reconcile research in the political economy tradition with the first generation of scholarship on INGOs, which observed greater cooperation between such organizations: The INGOs studied by each group of scholars may have been operating in environments with different levels of density.

The experience of INGOs focused on international environmental conservation illustrates these dynamics (see also Chapter 5). Although the US conservation landscape had many important players by 1961, the World Wildlife Fund in the United States (WWF-US) was one of the first groups with an explicitly international focus. WWF-US had a cooperative ethos;[39] it was an important grant maker and stimulated the creation of other groups that supported its programming in specific locations or on certain topics. Other INGOs followed the WWF-US model of mutual support. For example, the Charles Darwin Foundation was formed in 1992 to fund conservation projects in the Galapagos, including both its own programs and those of other INGOs. As the founder described it, "When we started

37 Interview, Elizabeth Robinson, Founder, Sekolo, by telephone, January 25, 2020.
38 Ibid.
39 Schwarzenbach (2011, 73).

this organization in 1992, honestly it was pretty lonely. We were able to grow the field more generally by growing our own budget and showing up as funders throughout the 1990s."[40]

But competition among INGOs grew in the 2000s. In response, WWF-US began to gradually move away from grant-making toward a focus on its own distinctive programming. And other conservation organizations began to more jealously guard their "turf." As the founder of Pandas International explained, other INGOs with an interest in panda preservation actively discouraged her from founding her own group in 2000:

> Before [founding] we talked to [another panda conservation organization]. And they were very, "Oh, you know, you wouldn't want to do that. It's too hard. Don't do it." I think they saw us as competition, essentially. And we went ahead, because that's sort of my personality … but the first few years were very difficult.[41]

Overall, the history of WWF-US and the Charles Darwin Foundation suggests that many INGOs viewed their peers as supporters during the 1980s and 1990s. But the experience of more recent founders in the American international conservation sector – many of whom we interviewed in connection with this project[42] – illustrates the competitive dynamics that discouraged foundings in later time periods.

When discussing new foundings, the INGO leaders we interviewed were careful to emphasize that they did not perceive a decreased *need* for their work today. Many offered positive assessments of the potential for new foundings to drive innovation that could better meet these needs. But they also expressed concerns about how new INGOs could thrive in the current competitive market. As one leader in the global health sector described these trends:

> [T]here's more competition than ever for a finite amount of traditional development and assistance … And so there's space for new entrants, but not in dollar terms, necessarily. I think [of] the space in terms of the needs, to draw

40 Interview, Johanna Barry, Founder, Galapagos Conservancy, by telephone, September 28, 2016.

41 Interview, Suzanne Braden, Founder, Pandas International, by telephone, October 5, 2016.

42 See a fuller treatment of this case in Bush and Hadden (2019).

up new answers and offer new, innovative models for solving these massive development challenges.[43]

As a leader at a large humanitarian INGO also explained:

> Do I think that there's room for more? Yes. I also think that if you only had one organization, there wouldn't be new ideas and new innovation that come from new places. So, I do think that's necessary. Although . . . the more and more that come out, it's harder for each of those to fundraise. And so, [there are] definitely challenges with that.[44]

Our 2019 survey of American INGO leaders also provides some initial support for our argument and the general trends identified in Figures 3.1 and 3.2.[45] We asked respondents which funding sources their organization relied on; they named these (in descending order of importance) as private foundations, IGOs, for-profit businesses, national governments, other NGOs, and individual donors.[46] Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of respondents said it had become more difficult for their organization to obtain funding over the past ten years, while 10 percent said it had become easier and 27 percent noted no change. If population density has increased so much that it is discouraging new American INGO foundings, we would expect there to be considerable and increasing competition for funding, which most respondents in our survey described. Whereas respondents who thought their issue area was collaborative felt this made it "somewhat easier" for their organization to achieve its mission on average, respondents who thought their issue was competitive believe this made it "somewhat more difficult."

3.4 Measuring American INGO Foundings

Thus far, we have presented YIO data on global and American INGO foundings (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Yet the YIO – despite

[43] Interview with health sector leader, January 14, 2021, by Zoom.
[44] Interview with director at American humanitarian INGO, November 15, 2021, by Zoom.
[45] For more details on the survey sample and methods, see Chapter 1 and Appendix.
[46] They also reported other, less important funding sources such as fees for service, membership dues, and impact investing.

its widespread use in IR and other disciplines – has important limitations.[47] It relies on existing INGOs, the media, and IGOs' lists for information about INGO creation, and then on voluntary self-reporting and desk research for information on INGO activities and funding.[48] As such, it is missing entries for many smaller INGOs that are relevant for our measurement of foundings and density.[49]

Thus, for our quantitative analysis, we mainly rely on data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) which maintains information on American nonprofit organizations that is drawn from US government tax records.[50] The data is useful because American nonprofits classified as 501(c)(3)s with revenues of $50,000 or more (except certain religious organizations) are required to submit financial information to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). For each organization, the NCCS gathers information on when the IRS recognized it as tax exempt, its revenues, and its issue area, which is primarily identified from program descriptions.[51] As of February 2024, the NCCS data have been released through 2019, so our analysis covers foundings during the period from 1992 to 2019 for an examination of the post-Cold War era.[52]

We focus on four populations of American INGOs in the NCCS data based on their issue area coding there: conservation, civil society and democracy, global health, and humanitarianism.[53] In our evaluation of population dynamics, it is important that relatively few INGOs were founded before our study period begins (1992) to avoid concerns about left censoring in the data. Thus, we examine the four major NCCS issue areas from the universe of US INGOs of which no more than 20 percent were founded prior to 1992. Other issue areas of interest – such as human rights and international development – are less suitable for

47 Bloodgood (2016); Bloodgood, Stroup, and Wong (2023).

48 Murdie and Davis (2012, 180).

49 Bush, Hadden, and Pavlik (2024).

50 For this analysis, we use the NCCS' Core Data PZ Files, which include 501(c)(3) organizations that file either IRS Form 990 or Form 990EZ.

51 Although some other countries have similar rosters, to our knowledge there is no comprehensive roster of global INGOs with comparable depth.

52 Available at https://urbaninstitute.github.io/nccs/catalogs/catalog-core.html (last accessed February 29, 2024).

53 For further details on how we identified these populations from the NCCS data, please consult Online Appendix §1. See Bush and Hadden (2025a).

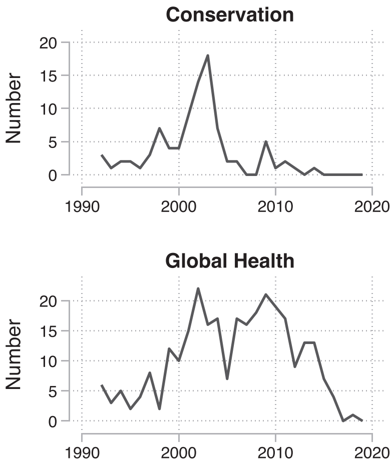


Figure 3.4 American INGO foundings by population, 1992–2019
Notes: The source is the National Center for Charitable Statistics, Core Data PZ Files.

this analysis because their populations were already very large when our data begins.

The resulting set of American INGO populations is diverse in three significant ways. Two involve commons problems (conservation and global health) and two do not (civil society and democracy and humanitarianism). Moreover, two involve work in primarily Global South countries (global health and humanitarianism), while two entail work in both the Global North and South (conservation and civil society and democracy). Finally, the populations vary in peak sizes (e.g., a few dozen conservation INGOs vs. several thousand humanitarian INGOs in the last years of our NCCS data). Examining diverse INGO populations allows us to identify the effect of density across sectors with different fixed issue area characteristics.

Figure 3.4 charts the number of INGO foundings by year and issue area; foundings are defined as the year the IRS recognizes an INGO as tax exempt. Across all four populations, more INGOs were founded each year until a certain point, after which fewer were created. These patterns support our expectation that foundings are density dependent. Each population's peak occurs in a different year, which suggests that no common shock discouraged foundings. Moreover, the curvilinear trends in foundings do not correlate with revenues reported to the IRS. Figure 3.5 (on total revenues reported by INGOs in each

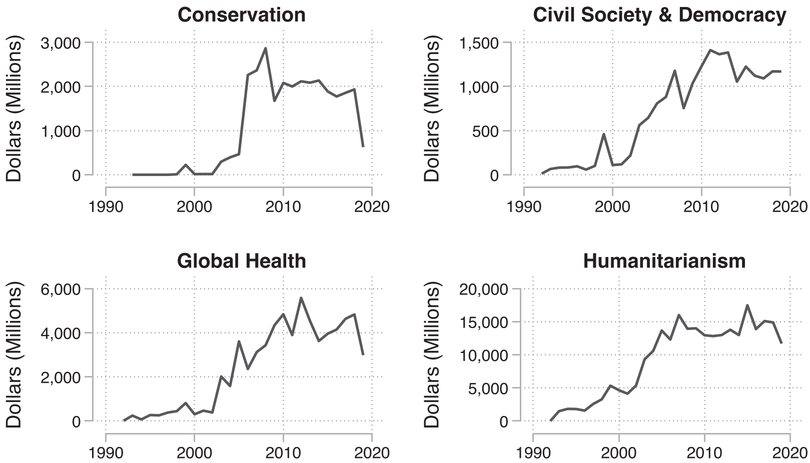


Figure 3.5 American INGO revenues by population, 1992–2019
Notes: Revenues are shown in millions of constant 2020 US dollars. The sources are the National Center for Charitable Statistics, Core Data PZ Files, and the US Inflation Calculator.

population according to their tax filings) reveals that there is little correspondence between foundings and revenues, with the potential exception of the humanitarian population, which experienced a leveling off in both around 2010. These trends provide some prima facie evidence that existing frameworks may be inadequate for explaining INGO foundings.

3.5 What Explains American INGO Foundings?

To test our argument, we create a measure of population density. As explained earlier, following other studies in the organizational ecology tradition,[54] we conceptualize density as the number of organizations in a given population. We therefore use the number of INGOs that were "alive" in a population in a given year (i.e., the number of organizations that have been recognized by the IRS but have not died).[55] Density is as large as 3,325 INGOs in the humanitarian population in 2018. To model the theorized curvilinear effect of density, we include a

[54] Carroll and Hannan (1989); Lecy and Slyke (2013).
[55] As discussed more later in the chapter an INGO's death occurs when it fails to file a tax return for at least three consecutive years and does not reenter the NCCS dataset.

measure of the field's density as well as its square. We expect density to be positively related to foundings and density squared to be negatively related to them, consistent with the idea that density has a curvilinear effect.

We also gathered data to test alternative explanations of INGO foundings. First, we measured the financial resources available to INGOs in a population, using several strategies. Since US foreign aid is a major funding source for many organizations, our first indicator is US foreign economic assistance. We used the AidData coding scheme to identify the amount of aid in the previous year in each issue area.[56] This variable is logged to deal with skewness. As some INGOs are not eligible for or amenable to accepting government funding, as an alternative, we also use data on total US private giving to international charities, which is positively correlated with public funding.[57] Both measures were recorded in constant US dollars. While we acknowledge that financial resources are only one type of resource on which INGOs rely, INGO leaders in the United States have reported in surveys that they perceive funding concerns as the main obstacle to achieving their goals,[58] indicating this is a key dimension of the resource environment.

Second, we gathered data on issue attention in the previous year by sector. We used a sample of newspapers contained in Nexis Uni (formerly Lexis-Nexis Academic) and counted the number of references of keywords associated with each issue area.[59] This database includes English-language newspapers from throughout the world as well as foreign-language articles translated into English. We took the natural log of the number of references to address the problem of skewness and lagged the variable by one year. We also gathered data on policy attention using the natural log of the number of times the same keywords were mentioned in the previous year in the US Congress using the Congressional Record, Daily Edition.

Although the number of INGO foundings is, by definition, bounded by zero, we use ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions since there

[56] Tierney et al. (2011). Online Appendix §2 contains further details on how we identified foreign assistance for each issue area from AidData. See Bush and Hadden (2025a).

[57] Giving USA Foundation (2016).

[58] Mitchell and Schmitz (2014).

[59] Online Appendix §2 lists the search terms. See Bush and Hadden (2025a).

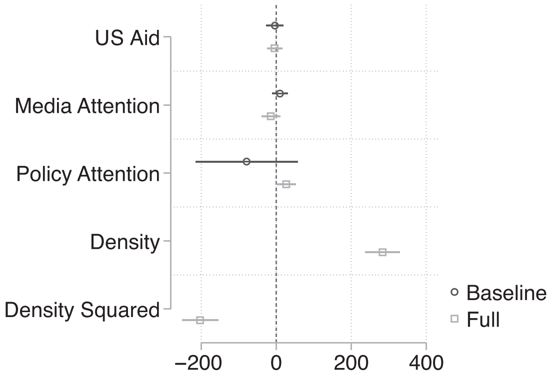


Figure 3.6 The correlates of American INGO foundings, 1992–2019
Notes: Based on OLS models that estimate the number of foundings in a given year. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are shown. Standard errors are clustered by sector. $N = 112$. *US Aid*, *Media Attention*, and *Policy Attention* are logged. *Density* and *Density Squared* are standardized for visualization purposes. All explanatory variables are lagged by one year. Online appendix §3 reports these results in a table (Bush and Hadden, 2025a).

can be as many as 445 foundings per population-year. Our results are similar when we employ negative binomial models – an estimation technique used when the outcome variable is a count measure with overdispersion.[60] In all analyses, standard errors are clustered by population. For visualization, we standardized the density variables so that their mean values are 0 and their standard deviations are 1.

Figure 3.6 presents our main results. In our baseline model, which includes the variables identified in previous work, we use our lagged yearly issue area measures of US aid, media attention, and policy attention. Our full model includes our measures of density and density squared to test for the presence of the predicted inverted u-shaped relationship.

Figure 3.6 illustrates that the main explanatory variables employed in previous theory are generally not significantly related to INGO foundings in the baseline model. But adding our measures of density and density squared significantly improves the model fit. As

[60] Online Appendix §4.1 reports the results associated with this robustness check and the others described in this chapter. See Bush and Hadden (2025a).

expected, our density variables have the expected curvilinear relationship with foundings. The estimated coefficients are positive and significant for density and negative and significant for density squared, which is consistent with our argument about the changing dynamics of competition over time. Although density is at first associated with more foundings ($p < 0.001$), that gain decreases as density increases and eventually becomes negative ($p = 0.001$). Important variables associated with the "demand-side" alternative explanations – such as US aid and media attention – are not significantly associated with INGO foundings, although the media attention variable comes near statistical significance ($p = 0.119$) in an unexpected negative direction in the full model. By contrast, policy attention to the issue area is positively and significantly correlated with foundings ($p = 0.050$) in the full model, consistent with previous theory.

One concern is that what we interpret as density dependence may be simply time dependence. In other words, the curvilinear relationship may be a natural consequence of population aging. To address this possibility, in additional models, we control for population age or the year since the founding of each issue area's first INGO. Since density and density squared retain the same signs and statistical significance in this model, and population age does not have a clear relationship with foundings, we suggest the patterns in our data reflect density dependence rather than time dependence. In other models, we introduce sector indicator variables, and our results regarding the curvilinear relationship between density and foundings remain robust.

Another concern is that the analysis does not directly demonstrate the effects of competition. We seek to provide evidence of this mechanism using our case study analysis, but we also explore it quantitatively by introducing a lagged indicator of annual sector concentration to the models as a robustness check. The indicator is the proportion of the population's total revenue held by the four largest INGOs.[61] We expect that as a population's concentration decreases, it will be more competitive. Contrary to our expectations, concentration is not significantly related to foundings, although it is signed in the expected positive direction. At the same time, the significant, curvilinear effect of density remains, suggesting that it may be the more important measure

[61] This is a common measure of concentration in markets which is used in economics and referred to as the "four-firm concentration ratio."

of competition. As we explore in more detail in Chapter 4, a concentrated market may deter certain types of foundings (e.g., generalists) more than others (e.g., specialists) rather than having an effect on foundings writ large.

Our results regarding density are robust to other tests, as well. We begin with alternative measures of key concepts, including private charitable giving instead of US foreign aid.[62] To explore the possibility that the effect of density takes longer to appear given the duration of funding cycles, we also use longer lags (2–6 years) instead of our standard one-year lag for the explanatory variables. We next introduce additional controls, including the number of IGOs active in the issue area according to our coding of the YIO, INGO access to IGOs, an annual measure of the average level of democracy in the world, an indicator for Republican control of Congress, an indicator variable for the years after September 11, an annual measure of the average INGO's revenues, and an annual measure of the total number of INGOs in the world.[63] We also run our models with year indicator variables and clustering the standard errors on the population and year. Finally, we analyze the YIO data on American INGO foundings. Across all models, and unless otherwise noted, density and density squared are important predictors of foundings in the expected ways.

Overall, our analysis suggests that American INGO foundings are density dependent. Further, we find several intriguing relationships between foundings and the control variables. While policy attention is positively correlated with foundings in the full model, media attention and foreign aid are not. Still, these results should be interpreted with caution. We acknowledge that there are inferential challenges associated with relying on observational data in which many variables trend over time. In addition, the relationships between resources and foundings may be population specific. Thus, in the next section, we more closely examine this relationship using a case study that is designed to speak more directly to the posited causal mechanism – that INGO populations grow quickly at low levels of

62 Giving USA Foundation (2016, 7).

63 Data on INGO access to IGOs comes from Tallberg et al. (2013), data on democracy in the world comes from Teorell et al. (2016), data on INGO revenues comes from the NCCS, and data on IGOs active on the four issue areas and the total number of INGOs in the world comes from Union of International Associations (1953–2023).

density due to mutual support, but slowly at higher levels of density due to competition.

3.6 Foundings of Civil Society and Democracy INGOs

For our case study, we focus on INGOs working in the area of civil society and democracy. This sector experienced a large influx of policy and media attention and financial resources starting in the early 2000s. At the same time, it exhibits a clear inverted-u curve in foundings (Figure 3.4). Because it is thus representative or typical of the general causal relationship suggested by the quantitative analysis, but puzzling from the perspective of alternative explanations, it is an appropriate case for further qualitative analysis.[64] If we do not find evidence of the hypothesized causal mechanism in this case, this absence would constitute strong evidence against our theory.

Prior work frequently portrays civil society and democracy promotion INGOs as competitive.[65] The issue area has several features that might encourage competition. For example, it has a relatively large number of INGOs compared to conservation INGOs (which we consider in Chapter 5) and relies heavily on US government funding. Because many American INGOs working on civil society and democracy must bid for the same federal funding, we might expect them to view each other as competitors. Given these conditions, it is difficult for existing theory to explain the organizational cooperation and mutual support during the field's early years, which we will document here.

Our case study analyzes published primary and secondary sources including academic research, books and memoirs published by practitioners, published interviews, INGO publications (e.g., annual reports and websites), and news sources. We also interviewed seven representatives from INGOs founded in different periods and asked about their creation and subsequent evolution. In many cases, we were able to speak directly with the founder, which gave us great insight into this process.[66] In addition, we consulted notes from more than

[64] Lieberman (2005); Seawright and Gerring (2008).
[65] Henderson (2002); Mendelson and Glenn (2002); Brown (2006, 2009); Bush (2015).
[66] The Appendix details our interview methods.

100 interviews conducted for a previous project on civil society and democracy NGOs.[67]

3.6.1 A Brief History of Democracy Promotion

Democracy promotion refers to efforts to support democratization in other countries, which includes helping countries transition to democracy as well as efforts to help consolidate democracy in previously transitioned states. The primary actors in democracy promotion are states and IGOs. The United States is a leader but by no means the only country that has made advancing democracy abroad part of its foreign policy.[68,69] States use a variety of tools to promote democracy, including military intervention to support regime change, conditional foreign assistance, diplomatic shaming, and direct assistance.[70] Regional organizations including the European Union and Organization of American States are key actors in this area; they heavily employ membership conditionality.[71]

INGOs also play a key role in democracy promotion. Their activities primarily involve implementation of democracy assistance programs funded by the United States and others. For instance, INGOs may directly support domestic NGOs in nondemocratic or recently transitioned countries, sponsor election observers, advise public officials on reform measures, or provide legal aid. Such programs take place in more than 100 countries each year.[72] Donor states and IGOs often prefer to work through INGOs, rather than directly aiding domestic NGOs in other countries, for a variety of reasons. Among these reasons, INGOs can transmit specialized knowledge, may have better capacity and financial reporting practices, and enjoy closer relationships with funders.[73]

[67] Bush (2015).
[68] Although the United States is a key state player in democracy promotion, it is not the only one. For example, supporting democracy within Europe and in its neighborhood is an important aspect of European integration.
[69] Börzel and Risse (2009).
[70] Carothers (1999).
[71] Donno (2013).
[72] Bush (2015, 8).
[73] Bush (2016).

Democracy promotion has a long (if troubled) tradition in US foreign policy.[74] However, unlike some other tools of democracy promotion (such as military intervention), democracy *assistance* is relatively new. Most date its formal beginning to 1983, when President Ronald Reagan created the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a quasi-private foundation that receives money from Congress to promote democracy via grants to INGOs and NGOs. Four American INGOs were founded around the same time as the NED – the Center for International Private Enterprise, Free Trade Union Institute, International Republican Institute (IRI), and National Democratic Institute (NDI). These organizations were created to represent the interests of business, unions, and the Republican and Democratic parties in aiding democracy abroad.[75] These groups both regrant funding to other organizations (both INGOs and domestic NGOs in other countries) and also conduct their own direct programs. These core INGOs, and others founded in the 1980s like the Carter Center (founded in 1982) and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES, founded in 1987), continue to be central players in the sector.

As we discuss in the next section, American funding for civil society and democracy dramatically increased in the years following the creation of the NED as part of a growing emphasis on democracy assistance in US foreign policy. This period of growth in democracy assistance coincided with growth in the INGO sector in the United States. In addition to new INGOs being founded, some existing INGOs that were historically focused on other issues developed competencies related to civil society and democracy in order to take advantage of the new opportunities.

3.6.2 The Resource Environment

Our analysis reveals a substantial increase in the resources available to civil society and democracy INGOs, especially in the 2000s (see Figure 3.5). This surge in funding was accompanied by an uptick in policy attention. The field first expanded at the end of the Cold War, when many democratizing states sought out foreign assistance

74 Bouchet (2013).

75 Although these INGOs depend heavily on government funding, they are all legally independent from it.

to help with their transitions. In response, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced a new "democracy initiative." Between 1993 and 1999, USAID administrator J. Brian Atwood – previously the founding president of NDI – worked to mainstream democracy promotion.[76] Under his guidance, funding expanded and became institutionalized.

Government funding continued to rise in the 2000s, especially with President George W. Bush's "freedom agenda." Whereas democracy assistance represented around 8 percent of USAID's budget in 1990, it was roughly 16 percent in 2009.[77] Although the largest funder of US democracy assistance INGOs was (and still is) the US government, other governments and IGOs also made significant investments. Across the field, annual funding rose from under $1 billion in the late 1980s to over $10 billion in 2015.[78] Private foundations play a role, too – particularly the Open Society Foundations (created by George Soros).[79]

Stagnation in American INGO foundings in this population occurred at the same time that democracy promotion was at the heart of President Bush's foreign policy. For example, Bush declared in a speech to the American Enterprise Institute in 2003 that "the world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values,"[80] and forcefully reiterated this theme in his second inaugural address in January 2005.[81] IGOs' democracy promotion activity also increased during this period, for example with the formation of the United Nations (UN) Democracy Caucus in 2004 and the UN Democracy Fund in 2005. The peak year of American INGO foundings in democracy assistance was 2002, when sixty four new organizations were created. By 2005, the number of new INGO foundings had plummeted to eight. Organizational ecology helps us understand why this era of significant funding

[76] Bush (2015, 126–127).
[77] Ibid (7).
[78] Carothers (2015, 60).
[79] Carothers (1996).
[80] "President Discusses the Future of Iraq," February 26, 2003. Available at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html (last accessed May 5, 2017).
[81] "President Sworn-In to Second Term, January 20, 2005." Available at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html (last accessed May 5, 2017).

and media, policy, and IGO attention was accompanied by relatively low INGO growth.

3.6.3 Early Increases in Density Encouraged Foundings

We have already established that the curvilinear pattern of American INGO foundings in the civil society and democracy population is consistent with our theory. It is also less easily explained with a straightforward political economy approach, given that the decrease in foundings coincided with a massive expansion of financial resources in the United States. Yet can we attribute this pattern in foundings to a shift from mutual support to competition?

The early years of democracy assistance often did involve cooperation among INGOs, even though they were competing to secure US government funding. For example, IFES, IRI, and NDI came together to create the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) in 1995. The CEPPS was designed as a USAID funding mechanism that would give participating organizations privileged access to democracy assistance, solidifying them as the "core" actors in the field.[82]

Although large INGOs dominated the scene, entrepreneurs still saw opportunities. Anticipating dynamics that we study with respect to specialization in Chapter 4, new INGOs often occupied niches left open by older organizations, such as those involved with CEPPS. For example, Barbara Ferris decided to found the International Women's Democracy Center in 1995 after visiting multiple transitioning democracies with the Peace Corps and hearing from women that they wanted to learn how to run for office. Her approach was to work with other organizations; she explained, "There's only a limited number of dollars in the field, guys, so we need to work with others to get things done."[83] Similarly, Wendy Luers created Charter 77 New York to support the Charter 77 civic initiative in Communist Czechoslovakia. At first, it cooperated with related organizations working on similar issues, even

[82] Interview, former NDI executive, by telephone, September 28, 2016.
[83] Interview, Barbara Ferris, Founder, International Women's Democracy Center, by telephone, October 4, 2016.

sharing office space with the Soros Foundations.[84] During this period, INGOs worked together to build the field's profile. The NED sponsored the International Forum for Democratic Studies and founded the *Journal of Democracy* to support research related to democracy assistance. One group of INGOs created the World Movement for Democracy, a periodic international conference, and another forged the ACE Network, a resource hub on electoral assistance. Although many INGOs performed similar (and sometimes identical) functions – for example, multiple groups monitored the same country's elections using equivalent techniques[85] – if anything, this seemed to increase demand for their services. New graduate degree programs related to democracy assistance were created, such as the Democracy and Governance Program at Georgetown University; INGO leaders served as adjunct faculty, which enhanced the sector's professionalism and reflected the tendency toward mutual support.

3.6.4 Later Increases in Density Discouraged Foundings

Yet competition among INGOs gradually escalated, despite increased funding overall. Given mechanisms such as CEPPS, the nature of competition was not that of an open market. Nevertheless, several studies on the topic from the late 1990s and early 2000s emphasized that INGOs during the time period were competing over donor funding.[86] Sarah Bush quantified the increase in funding competition by establishing that large INGOs' share of NED grants decreased from 90 percent in 1985 to 50 percent in 2009, at the same time as the average grant size shrank by more than two-thirds.[87] Funding rates in democracy assistance are difficult to obtain, but the proportion of grant applications that are funded was reported as lower than 20 percent in 2013, suggesting the extent of resource competition among INGOs is significant.[88]

[84] Interview, Wendy Luers, Founder, Foundation for Culture and Society, by telephone, September 23, 2016.
[85] Kelley (2009).
[86] Henderson (2002); Mendelson and Glenn (2002); Brown (2006, 2009).
[87] Bush (2015, 116–117).
[88] Rebekah Usatin, "Evaluation of Democracy Assistance Grantmaking," Presentation at the University of Pennsylvania, May 1, 2013.

Given these changes, civil society and democracy INGOs employed many strategies in an attempt to survive. Our interviews indicate that these strategies included asking friends in the US government to pressure USAID to fund their INGO; winning contracts to evaluate other INGOs' programs and then being highly critical; fighting to win the allegiance of the best local partners; and applying for many available grants and contracts, even for work in countries or on issues in which the INGO lacked experience. According to one analysis, INGOs tended to "pursue short-term gains rather than collective long-term development," an organizational tendency characterized as "pathologi[cal]" from the perspective of advancing democracy.[89]

Entrepreneurs that founded INGOs during this competitive period acknowledge how density shaped their decisions. For example, James Apple founded the International Judicial Academy (IJA) to train judges overseas. IJA was supported by a combination of tuition fees, private and public grants, and individual contributions. Yet according to Apple, "as more and more organizations got involved in this work, it became increasingly difficult for the Academy to obtain funds for its programs."[90] One funder was the JEHT Foundation that collapsed in 2008 after fraudulent investment advisor Bernard Madoff lost most of its endowment. In response to fundraising difficulties, the IJA merged with another INGO, the International Law Institute. When asked what advice he would give to someone thinking of starting an INGO in 2016, Apple replied: "Based on my experiences, funding is very difficult. Unless you're in a position to attract large grants from the U.S. government, it's very difficult ... So that's my advice: you have to go into it with your eyes open."[91] Although some of the "have nots" in democracy assistance tried to challenge CEPPS members in 2015 through the Advancing Democratic Elections and Political Transitions consortium, the initiative stalled. As one person knowledgeable about

89 Henderson (2002, 143).
90 Interview, James Apple, Founder, International Judicial Academy, by telephone, October 19, 2016.
91 Ibid. To be clear, he was referring to the challenges associated with the emergence of other American INGOs, such as the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, not the emergence of homegrown democracy assistance INGOs from countries that were once the targets of democracy assistance.

the process explained, "it's not necessarily a cozy relationship because these organizations all compete with each other."[92]

As growth stagnated, older INGOs turned on what has been described as "strategic autopilot."[93] By the 2000s, INGOs founded in the 1980s were larger and more bureaucratic. Reflecting on NDI in 2010, one former long-time staff member commented, "By the mid-1990s, things had started to change – [NDI] started to become bureaucratized."[94] Another colleague concurred during an interview in 2010:

> NDI has become institutionalized. It became a permanent player in Washington at very high levels, and it wasn't obvious that it would become that when it started ... Now people enjoy the work, but you see yourself as a permanent fixture in a country's hopefully long-term liberalization. Both NDI and IRI have leaders that have been there for a while.[95]

Of course, this shift was not unique to NDI or IRI. An interviewee who worked at a different organization noted a similar dynamic: "There is that sort of bureaucratization where people have a stake in a particular approach without taking into account the political context."[96]

In sum, evidence from the field of democracy assistance supports the hypothesized causal mechanism. In the early era of the population – from roughly 1983 to 2000 – INGOs demonstrated a willingness to cooperate and establish institutions that would contribute to the field's legitimacy. But later – since roughly 2000 – the field became denser and more competitive. We therefore conclude that evidence from democracy assistance supports our density dependence argument.

3.7 Density and Organizational Mortality

Before concluding the chapter, we also consider the relationship between density and American INGO deaths. Here, we extend our theoretical framework for studying organizational foundings to help

92 Interview, former NDI executive, by telephone, September 28, 2016.
93 Carothers (2015, 64).
94 Interview, former NDI executive, by telephone, June 4, 2010.
95 Interview, former NDI executive, in person, May 26, 2010.
96 Interview, former democracy assistance donor, in person, May 4, 2010.

understand variation in organizational mortality. Organization ecology suggests that density will have a curvilinear effect on INGO death, in much the same way that it does on INGO foundings. The direction of the relationship, however, will be reversed: The probability of mortality will first *decline* and then eventually *increase* with density.

Organizational mortality is worth studying not only as a further extension of our theory but also given its real-world importance. An INGO's survival is usually key to achieving its social mission and, to a large extent, is an end in and of itself for the organization and its staff. In principle, an INGO ceasing to exist could be viewed as a sign of good performance: The organization has achieved its goals and is no longer needed. However, very few practitioners have closed down their organization for this reason. Instead, organizational death is usually a sign that the organization has been unable to secure funding and the other resources needed to continue its work, failing to survive in its environment.

3.7.1 How Density Affects INGO Deaths

At very low levels of density, we expect organizations to be relatively vulnerable to failure due to the newness of the organizational form. As discussed with respect to how density affects foundings, the early era of an organizational population is characterized by less legitimacy, mutual support from other organizations, and overall acceptance of the organizational form. These dynamics contribute to a relatively high probability of organizational death. The likelihood of mortality will decline over time as density increases and the population becomes better established. Yet once populations start to become quite dense, increases in density will introduce so much competition that organizations will be more likely to die. This dynamic contributes to the theorized curvilinear relationship between density and organizational death.

This theoretical perspective complements other recent analyses of organizational death in global governance. After a long tradition of studying IGO founding, scholars of global governance such as Julia C. Gray have more recently explored when (and how) organizations die or otherwise fall into disuse.[97] This research has

[97] Gray (2018); Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2020, 2021); Debre and Dijkstra (2021).

identified several predictors of organizational death. For instance, Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni highlights the importance of major political and economic shocks to the international system (e.g., world wars) for IGO mortality.[98] Such events may similarly have a significant impact on INGO deaths.

Researchers have also focused on the individual organizational characteristics that make groups more likely to survive. Certain types of IGOs – smaller ones, ones with narrow missions, and those lacking bureaucratic autonomy – tend to be more vulnerable to death, perhaps because they are less able to adapt to changing circumstances. Some of the same characteristics may also apply to INGOs, as we expect larger organizations to be better able to deal with environmental challenges. In addition, past studies of nonprofit failure have determined that characteristics such as age and funding profiles are predictors of closure.[99]

3.7.2 Measuring INGO Deaths

We use the NCCS data discussed earlier to test these theoretical expectations. We again focus on organizations in the conservation, civil society and democracy, global health, and humanitarian populations to parallel the structure of our earlier analysis.

Organizations do not formally register their mortality with the IRS in the way they do their founding when they register for tax-exempt status. A common benchmark of organizational mortality for American nonprofits is when an organization fails to file taxes at least three years in a row. Although it is not unusual for an organization to fail to file a tax return due to disorganization or capacity issues, after three years of non-filing, an organization loses its tax-exempt status with the IRS, making this an appropriate cut-off for organizational death.[100] Because we identify organizations as having died if they fail to file tax returns for three consecutive years and never reenter our dataset, we exclude the most recent years of NCCS data from our analysis, since

[98] Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2021).
[99] Hager, Galaskiewicz, and Larson (2004).
[100] See IRS, "Exempt Organizations Annual Reporting Requirements – Filing Procedures: Late Filing of Annual Returns." Available at www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/exempt-organizations-annual-reporting-requirements-filing-procedures-late-filing-of-annual-returns (last accessed October 24, 2022).

we cannot be certain whether organizations that failed to file returns in those years ultimately died.

Using this approach, INGO death is quite common in the NCCS data: About 9 percent of organizations in our dataset die in a given year (a significantly higher exit rate than that of American nonprofits in general), and 45 percent of the American INGOs in our dataset die eventually.[101] This annual mortality rate is more equivalent to the rate of death among IGOs in an entire *decade* according to calculations by Eilstrup-Sangiovanni.[102] Given the high start-up costs of negotiating a new IGO highlighted by classic theories of international cooperation,[103] this comparison is unsurprising. Moreover, the relatively high threat of organizational mortality is consistent with INGO entrepreneurs' need to think carefully about when to enter the market and how best to position their organizations to succeed in a population that may be crowded or otherwise starved of resources.

An important caveat for this discussion is that the NCCS data does not track whether an organization has entirely disbanded or has instead stopped filing tax returns because it has merged with or been acquired by another organization.[104] However, mergers and acquisitions are uncommon among INGOs and are rarely pursued to enhance "efficiency and effectiveness"; they are usually considered "as a response to crisis or to external pressures."[105] We would therefore expect the factors that predict mergers to be largely similar to those that lead to true organizational death.

3.7.3 Results

Our empirical strategy involves estimating the likelihood that an organization will fail in a given year using linear probability models (or OLS regressions with binary instead of continuous outcome variables).[106] Our regressions use standard errors clustered by the INGO population. As before, we standardize the density variables so that

101 Harrison and Laincz (2008, 4).
102 Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2020, 353).
103 For example, Keohane (1984).
104 Other possibilities are that the organization continues to exist but is no longer based in the United States or is no longer tax exempt. In these cases, however, we would consider the organization to no longer exist as an American INGO.
105 Mitchell, Schmitz, and van Vijfeijken (2020, 212).
106 Our results are similar when we instead use logistic regressions.

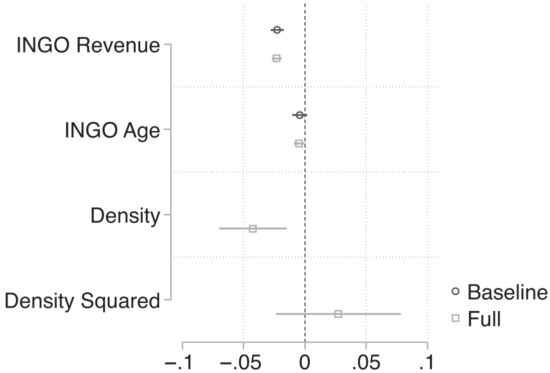


Figure 3.7 The correlates of American INGO deaths, 1992–2016
Notes: Based on linear probability models with an outcome of INGO death in a given year. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are shown. Standard errors are clustered by sector. *N* = 24,078. *INGO Revenue* is logged. *Density* and *Density Squared* are lagged by one year. *Density*, *Density Squared*, and *INGO Age* are standardized for visualization purposes. Year indicator variables are included in both models but not displayed. Online Appendix §3 reports these results in a table (Bush and Hadden, 2025a).

they have means of 0 and standard deviations of 1 for visualization purposes. Figure 3.7 displays the results.

The baseline model includes two organizational-level factors that previous research suggests may shape the likelihood of organizational survival and death: The organization's size (measured in terms of its revenues and then logged due to skewness) and age (measured in years and then standardized for visualization), both of which we expect to be negatively correlated with mortality. It also includes indicator variables for each year. As expected, wealthier and older organizations are significantly less likely to die in a given year. To capture the hypothesized curvilinear relationship between INGO death and density, we introduce variables capturing density and density squared in the full model. Here, we see evidence of the hypothesized u-shaped relationship between density and organizational mortality. Both variables are signed in the expected directions, although the density-squared variable is not statistically significant at conventional levels ($p = 0.011$ for density and $p = 0.177$ for density squared). Overall, the picture is that American INGO deaths are density dependent as predicted by our theory.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to demonstrate that American INGO foundings and deaths are density dependent: They are affected by how crowded the sector is at a given point in time. The findings also suggest that the extent to which INGO relations in a particular population are characterized more by cooperation or competition depends on density, and that new INGO entrepreneurs may be crowded out by excessive competition. Although we focus on the population of INGOs based in the United States – for which we have exceptionally good data – our theoretical perspective likely applies to INGOs based in other countries.

Our approach helps reconcile previously conflicting findings in the literature on INGOs. Early studies suggested that cooperation was common, but later ones emphasized competition. Although we remain agnostic about the normative implications of increased competition – which can drive efficiency as well as less desirable behavior – these changes in actor relations should be more widely appreciated. Although reforms to contracting environments as suggested by Cooley and Ron may help minimize the problems associated with INGO competition,[107] we suspect that particular contracting environments are neither necessary nor sufficient for INGO cooperation in highly dense populations. We discuss our recommendations for funders in Chapter 6.

The stagnation in INGO foundings that we document may provide openings for new populations of actors, although in some cases individuals who might have founded an INGO in a less-dense period may not be pursuing careers in social change.[108] For example, the TOMS example suggests that would-be founders have been inspired to create new kinds of organizations, including public benefit B-Corps, to achieve their social goals outside the realm of INGO activity. As INGO populations age, they may become more bureaucratic and less innovative, further strengthening the appeal of these challengers.[109] Since a rise of organizational challengers to INGOs may have important implications for global governance, Chapter 6 further explores these dynamics.

[107] Cooley and Ron (2002).
[108] Abbott, Green, and Keohane (2016).
[109] Bush (2015).

4 *The Growing Specialization of INGOs*

In 2003, Rob Mather, a graduate of Harvard Business School, saw a television program about a two-year-old girl named Terri who had been badly burned in a house fire.[1] Mather was so moved by Terri's plight, he organized a charity swim to raise funds for her care. To his surprise, 10,000 people from 75 countries participated in the first year. After the "Swim for Terri" event, several swimmers proposed to continue their charitable efforts in the next year. Eager to make use of this enthusiastic network, Mather began to research neglected global diseases for which they could fundraise. As he describes:

> There was a very simple choice initially, that choice was not for a developed world disease, not for cancer or heart disease, because I think, relatively speaking, they get a lot of support. But there are many areas of the world that are relatively neglected where a relatively small amount of money goes a long way.
>
> So the list that I came up with initially was HIV/AIDS, TB [tuberculosis], malaria, land mines, fresh water, diarrhea … And so I went through each of those … back in 2005 there was relatively little attention paid to each of those things. HIV/AIDS, it's also a first-world problem. So again, was getting more money than in other areas. TB … quite a difficult one to work out what the right intervention would be … Fresh water: massive problem, difficult. Landmines: political.
>
> And then I looked a little bit deeper into malaria … and the thing that really struck me first of all was that the equivalent of seven 747 jumbo jets full of children under 5 were dying from malaria every day … and a humble bed net cost at the time $5 … And so I did a bit more research and the number of nets being distributed was in the low millions and the number of

[1] This narrative is derived from a "Giving What We Can" interview with Rob Mather: "Against Malaria Foundation: How Rob Mather Founded and Operates a Highly Effective Charity." Uploaded February 13, 2023. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4BRef5MO3s&ab_channel=GivingWhatWeCan (last accessed July 21, 2023).

cases of malaria was in the high hundreds of millions and so I thought, ah, gap! Not enough going on here.

Mather's analysis also led him to conclude that protection against malaria was cost-effective: His swimming network could protect an entire village by raising $1,000. The first "World Swim Against Malaria" in 2005 was a huge success: It raised $1.3 million to buy nets to protect over 500,000 people.

Over time, the swimming network formalized as a nonprofit organization – the Against Malaria Foundation (AMF) – which encourages fundraising in any form (not just swimming). According to its website and partnership materials, its guiding principles are efficiency, transparency, and demonstrating impact.[2] AMF is broadly recognized as a successful international nongovernmental organization (INGO); it has raised more than $500 million for over 200 million nets. GiveWell (a charity rating organization associated with the effective altruism philosophy) ranked it one of its top charities in 2022 in terms of cost effectiveness and evidence of impact.[3]

Although Mather describes developing his mission as a systematic research process, in some ways, it resembles the choice made by TOMS founder Blake Mycoskie (see Chapter 3). Both entrepreneurs chose to focus on a relatively specific issue: Providing bed nets in malaria-affected areas and shoes to children in need, respectively. As we document in this chapter, this type of mission specialization was common among the American INGOs that were founded around the same time as the AMF, which contrasts with the broader missions characteristic of older global health INGOs in the United States like Direct Relief (which provides emergency medical assistance globally) or MAP International (which provides medicines and health supplies to impoverished countries). This tendency toward specialization raises a host of questions. Why are nonprofit organizations' missions becoming narrower at the same time that global issues are arguably becoming more expansive and interconnected? Why focus narrowly on providing bed nets, for example, rather than investing more broadly in

2 See Against Malaria Foundation, "History." Available at www.againstmalaria.com/History.aspx (last accessed July 21, 2023).

3 GiveWell, December 2022, "Our Top Charities." Available at www.givewell.org/charities/top-charities (last accessed July 21, 2023).

supporting health systems? What made the strategy of mission specialization attractive to Mather at that particular point in time? This chapter argues that mission specialization is a response to growing population density. As many INGO sectors became more crowded in the early 2000s, entrepreneurs began seeking ways to distinguish their new organizations. Creating an organization with a specialized mission was one way to survive in a denser environment and thus became a more common strategy. This strategy had some advantages. For instance, specialist organizations are often credited with being focused and efficient. GiveWell's top four charities include AMF as well as another malaria-focused health INGO working in sub-Saharan Africa (the Malaria Consortium) and a health INGO providing cash incentives for vaccinations in Nigeria (New Incentives).[4] These groups are relatively specialized in terms of both geography and their focus on specific diseases within the global health field. Yet INGOs with narrow missions arguably lack ambition and scale in terms of the operations and resources needed to address contemporary global challenges: They may appear more successful simply because their goals are more easily achievable. As one INGO leader explained, for complex issues like global climate change, a narrow focus is not always desirable:

> The normal response from the humanitarian sector is "we have the solution to the problem we're trying to address." Normally it's a single resource deficiency. Somebody hasn't got food: we can give them food. Somebody hasn't got shelter: we can give them shelter. You are the one-stop shop … But with the climate problem, which we know is complex and multi-faceted, the humanitarian sector isn't able to say to its support base "that's the problem. We've got a solution," because we haven't.[5]

Specialized groups may also struggle to obtain visibility, influence, and partnerships. Generalist INGOs are more than four times more likely than specialist INGOs in the United States to receive attention

[4] GiveWell, December 2022, "Our Top Charities." Available at www.givewell.org/charities/top-charities (last accessed July 21, 2023).
[5] INGOs and the Long Humanitarian Century, "Who Do You Think You Are: The Past, Present, and Future of International NGOs," 21. Available at www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/media/5569/ingos-report-web-final.pdf (last accessed July 21, 2023).

in the media and policy debates according to our data.[6] Specialist INGOs often face funding and legitimacy deficits as a consequence. Many highly specialized INGOs are grassroots groups, which generally have the best of intentions and benefit from strong relationships with volunteers but are often lacking in accountability and professionalism.[7] Specialist INGOs are also vulnerable to economic and political changes: If their key funding source dries up or the country where they work becomes inhospitable, it is difficult for them to pivot their operations. Yet, generalist groups are most likely to be crowded out of dense environments, making specialism a better choice for organizational survival.

This chapter examines how INGOs decide on the scope of their missions and provides an explanation of why contemporary American INGOs are increasingly specialized. Since INGOs do not distribute profits, mission statements are central to their management, governance, and evaluation. An organization's mission determines which issues it works on, which organizations it will collaborate and compete with, and which funders will be likely to support it. We focus on mission *breadth* because defining an organization's mission is a core strategic decision made by INGO entrepreneurs and leaders. Our study is the first to systematically examine INGO mission breadth. Most research on INGOs has focused on organizations that define their missions broadly, which implies that generalism is the norm. In the human rights field, for example, prior work has focused on Amnesty International[8]; in the humanitarian field, it has concentrated on CARE and Médecins San Frontières (MSF);[9] and in the democracy promotion field, it puts more emphasis on the National Endowment for Democracy and Freedom House.[10] All of these organizations pursue generalist missions according to our framework since they are global and work on multiple sub-topics within their issue areas. Demonstrating some

6 Authors' calculation based on our coding of references to the names of American INGOs in the English-language media (based on Nexis Uni) and US Congressional proceedings, publications, hearings, and other documents (based on Congressional ProQuest) between 2008 and 2018. The sample of generalist and specialist INGOs used in these searches is described below.

7 Schnable (2021).

8 Clark (2001); Hopgood (2006); Wong (2012); Srivastava (2022).

9 Barnett (2009); Stroup (2012).

10 Scott and Steele (2005); Giannone (2010); Bush (2015).

of the advantages of generalism, they are all also highly visible and occupy central network positions in their fields.[11]

Investigating how INGO entrepreneurs weigh the advantages and disadvantages of generalism vs. specialism at different points in time requires understanding the logic underpinning decisions about INGO mission breadth. In this chapter, we begin by conceptualizing INGO mission breadth and reviewing what the literature on global governance says about decisions to specialize based on problem structure and the dynamics of mission creep and bureaucratization. Then, we turn to organizational ecology to theorize variation in INGO mission breadth. We argue that population density and concentration both encourage specialization. INGO leaders have expectations about what kinds of organizations will survive in a given environment, and this shapes their choices regarding mission breadth. We support this argument with an analysis of original data on American INGOs' mission statements. A case study of humanitarian INGOs further illustrates the value of our approach.

4.1 The Importance of Mission Breadth

A mission statement communicates the purpose or goal of an organization. Writing an organizational mission statement is a core decision for the founder of any nongovernmental organization (NGO), whether domestic or international. Decisions about an organization's mission are made very early on – often before officially registering it, hiring staff, or acquiring funding – and help define its goals and future activities.

In composing a mission statement, INGO leaders are typically responding to a social problem, such as helping girls access education in Afghanistan or vaccinating needy populations in Africa. For the human rights INGO Americas Watch, founded in 1981, the founders' impetus according to an early leader, Jeri Laber, was wanting "to take issue with the U.S. government's policies in the [Latin American] region."[12] Yet mission statements also define the organization's

[11] On the last point, see Bob (2009, 6) and Carpenter (2011, 70). However, Shibaike (2022) illustrates how a small, specialized INGO played an agenda-setting role in the case of pangolin conservation.

[12] Laber (2002, 129).

market segment. Thus, crafting such statements may involve considering the positions of other market participants – primarily other INGOs but also government agencies, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), firms, and other actors – as well as the potential for changes in resources or opportunities.

Since NGOs by definition do not distribute profits, mission statements are a core text by which they are evaluated internally and externally.[13] Although mission statements can evolve over time, once articulated, they become central to an organization's identity, and many INGOs are loathe to officially change them. Indeed, major deviations from an organization's initial mission statement risk defections from supporters or staff.[14] For example, after the George Floyd protests of 2020, the American environmental NGO Sierra Club was "frame[d] ... not strictly as promoting conservation or combating climate change, but as being a part of a broader movement for social and environmental justice."[15] Although this shift attracted some new audiences, it alienated others.

Mission statements vary in length and specificity, as well as the social or organizational processes that lead to their creation. Yet they all serve the same function – defining the organization's goals. In this chapter, we explore what factors entrepreneurs consider when deciding to define their goals broadly or narrowly.

We conceptualize *specialized missions* as ones that are limited in geographic scope (i.e., the number of countries in which an INGO works), programmatic scope (i.e., the range of sub-issues within a general issue area on which an INGO works), or both. By contrast, INGOs with *generalist missions* are "Jacks of all trades" within their issue areas and broad in their geographic scope. These dimensions of mission breadth are relevant for all INGOs; furthermore, they are substantively important since they capture vital dimensions on which the INGO resource environment is structured. For example, the United States Agency

13 Shibaike et al. (2023).
14 Polos, Hannan, and Carroll (2002).
15 David Gelles, "At the Sierra Club, a Focus on Race, Gender and the Environment, Too," *New York Times*, February 18, 2022. Available at www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/business/sierra-club-ramon-cruz-corner-office.html (last accessed March 31, 2022).

for International Development (USAID), an important government funder for many American INGOs, organizes its offices in terms of country missions and regional offices, as well as cross-cutting thematic concerns (e.g., "democracy, human rights, and governance"). Organizations set themselves apart on other dimensions besides mission content (e.g., tactics and strategies),[16] but the mission is generally created first. We compare two US-headquartered environmental INGOs to illustrate the difference between generalist and specialist missions. The WWF (now known just as this acronym but originally the World Wildlife Fund) has a broad mission defined on its website as:

> [T]o stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by: conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.[17]

The WWF is thus a generalist conservation INGO. It is a *conservation* organization writ large, rather than a *turtle* conservation organization or a conservation organization that enacts its mission only by conducting *research*. Moreover, its mission statement does not mention a geographic specialization; it is therefore a *global* organization. The WWF's designation as a generalist conservation INGO does not mean it works on everything and everywhere.[18] But INGOs with generalist missions such as the WWF can take on a relatively broad set of programs within their issue areas if they so choose and are not constrained to a narrow geographic focus. Pandas International (PI) is a US-based conservation INGO with a narrower mission, which its website describes as:

> [T]o ensure the preservation and propagation of the endangered Giant Panda. Pandas International provides public awareness and education,

16 Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2019).
17 WWF, "About WWF." Available at https://wwf.panda.org/discover/about_wwf/ (last accessed March 6, 2023).
18 For example, advocates often push large INGOs to expand, as when human rights INGOs like Amnesty International have been encouraged to do more to address related issues such as development and climate change. See Dorsey and Nelson (2008).

support for research, habitat preservation and enhancement, and assistance to Giant Panda Centers.[19]

This INGO defines its goals by referring to a particular species (pandas) and set of activities. Further, consistent with pandas' natural home, the organization's materials make it clear that it is focused on China. Thus, Pandas International is a specialized conservation INGO in terms of both its issue scope and its geographic focus. Taking on programming associated with another species or in another location would be inconsistent with this stated mission.

Given its generalist orientation, it is not surprising that the WWF is better known and more influential than Pandas International. "Gatekeeper" or leading INGOs – those that command deference from various powerful audiences and are well-positioned to influence the practices of states – almost always adopt a broader set of issues than other organizations in their field.[20] Yet defining an organization's mission involves trade-offs and risks, which are core to the theoretical predictions we develop below. The next two sections theorize more systematically about INGOs' decisions to specialize given these trade-offs, first drawing on existing international relations (IR) theory and then proposing a new approach.

4.2 Lessons from IR Theory about Mission Breadth

The IR literature has overlooked the question of why some INGOs choose to pursue general missions while others do not. This is a noteworthy omission since, as noted earlier, most prior work on INGOs has – either implicitly or explicitly – focused on the activities and effects of "gatekeeper" generalist organizations. This leaves open the question of why some organizations decide to specialize.

However, the IGO literature has extensively considered mission breadth. Research in this area offers four theoretical insights into INGO decisions about mission breadth. First, the rational design tradition treats the "scope of issues covered" – a similar concept to mission

[19] Pandas International, "About PI." Available at www.pandasinternational.org/6547-2/ (last accessed March 6, 2023).

[20] Stroup and Wong (2017, 51).

Table 4.1 ***Proportion generalists by American INGO population***

Issue Area	Proportion Generalists
Conservation	19
Civil Society and Democracy	20
Global Health	22
Humanitarianism	19

Notes: The source is the authors' original coding of American INGOs based on a sample of organizations from the NCCS.

breadth – as a key dimension on which IGOs vary.[21] According to this approach, issue scope increases with the extent of distribution and enforcement problems. If problem structure helps explain the scope of issues covered by a given organization, then we would expect some issue areas to be dealt with by generalist INGOs and others to be handled by more specialist INGOs.

Yet our new data on the mission scope of American INGOs illustrates that this is not the case. We systematically coded hundreds of American INGOs' mission statements using the methods described in Section 4.4. As Table 4.1 indicates, across all four main issue areas in our study – conservation, civil society and democracy, global health, and humanitarianism – about 20 percent of the organizations are generalists.[22] Yet these four issue areas have different problem structures and contracting concerns. For example, whereas conservation and global health are commons issues (and thus subject to enforcement problems), civil society and democracy and humanitarianism are not. Given the diversity of problem structures (as well as geographic focus and funding sources, as explained in Chapter 1), the similarity in the proportion of generalists across all four issues suggests the need for another perspective.

In the second theoretical insight offered in the literature, the tradition of studying IGOs as bureaucracies also explores mission scope, often emphasizing how IGOs expand their missions over time – a

[21] Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal (2001).

[22] The proportion of generalists within each issue area has varied historically, suggesting that there may be some issue-specific dynamics at play. We discuss these dynamics in more detail below.

phenomenon called "mission creep." Research in this area suggests that IGOs expand the number of issues they cover *not* because states demand that they do so or due to functional necessity, but because they seek new ways to expand their power and authority.[23] This type of mission creep has been linked to poor IGO performance[24] and is thought to result from bureaucrats creating new structures within existing organizations. Mission creep is more likely in IGOs that are more bureaucratic and whose staff are more empowered to pursue their own interests.[25]

Mission creep also occurs among INGOs, but our data suggests that it is seldom significant enough to result in the reclassification of an organization's mission breadth. For example, MSF has remained focused on providing emergency medical care globally since its founding more than fifty years ago, and the International Republican Institute has sought to advance freedom and democracy worldwide since 1983. Many specialized organizations have stayed that way, too. The Salvadoran American Humanitarian Foundation has preserved its geographic emphasis on providing aid to El Salvador since 1983, while the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (now known as IFES) has worked on elections within the overall civil society and democracy promotion population since its creation in 1987. Although these organizations have evolved in various ways, including in response to social needs and demand from local partners, these changes have not been sufficient to constitute a shift from generalism to specialization or vice versa.

To gain a more systematic perspective on this phenomenon, we also coded our sample of American INGOs' stated missions in the year of their founding, collecting data via the Internet Archive and web searches. Although we were missing data for 10 percent of the sample, reviewing organizations' stated missions in their founding year vs. the present day indicates that they rarely significantly change their mission breadth: 96 percent of organizations maintained the same scope, with only 3 percent of organizations going from specialists to generalists, and 1 percent going from generalists to specialists. Our case study of humanitarian INGOs in Section 4.6 covers some of the well-known

[23] Barnett and Finnemore (2004).
[24] Gutner (2005).
[25] Johnson (2014).

examples of American INGOs in that population that have bucked the overall trend and broadened their missions. Prominent organizations may be more likely to engage in mission creep since their relative strength in terms of funding and other resources allows them to make risky changes, as illustrated by case of the Sierra Club (discussed in Section 4.1).

Our finding that broadening from specialist to generalist missions is rare among American INGOs and may indicate that mission statements are more important to this organizational form than they are to other types of organizations, such as IGOs. Nonprofit organizations must establish their credibility to achieve their social change goals.[26] They face significant reputational challenges when they pursue funding opportunities and activities that diverge from their main purpose. Indeed, "avoiding mission creep" is among the most commonly referenced characteristics of effective INGOs according to a survey of leaders working in the United States.[27] Although INGOs may expand their activities or geographic reach over time, they may prefer to view these shifts as changes to their *programs* rather than their missions, and accordingly not update the latter. By contrast, IGO staff may favorably view expanding the organization's mission as an opportunity to increase its authority or independence from member states – and thus its influence in world politics.[28] Third, a related theme in the literature on bureaucratization and rationalization in global governance is the growth of epistemic communities comprised of transnational professionals, especially in the Global North.[29] As Michael N. Barnett, Jon C.W. Pevehouse, and Kal Raustiala explained in an overview of contemporary trends in global governance, "expert knowledge is increasingly valued over lived or learned knowledge."[30] As Hokyu Hwang and Walter W. Powell showed in their study of domestic nonprofits in the Bay Area in the mid-2000s, charities operated by professional personnel show higher levels of rationalization.[31] Insofar

26 Gourevitch and Lake (2012).
27 Mitchell (2015, 44).
28 Barnett and Finnemore (2004); Johnson (2014).
29 Haas (1992); Seabrooke (2014); Sending (2015).
30 Barnett, Pevehouse, and Raustiala (2022, 24).
31 Hwang and Powell (2009).

as certain issue areas are more likely to be filled by networks of professionals with shared backgrounds and credentials, then we would expect specialization to be more dominant among INGOs working on those issues. Our survey of American INGO leaders indicates that some American INGO populations are dominated by professionals with graduate training, whereas others are less reliant on such individuals: 92 percent of the respondents in the global health field had at least some graduate training, compared to 56 percent of those in conservation. Yet as discussed earlier (see Table 4.1), the proportion of specialist American INGOs is more or less the same in all four issue areas in our study. Thus, the demand for INGO specialization does not seem to be created by issue-specific professional networks in the United States.

A fourth possibility is that the rationalization of world politics has driven specialization in American INGOs across all issue areas in our study. After all, most of our survey respondents in all sectors had advanced degrees, indicative of this trend. We find this explanation plausible, although it seems equally plausible that growth in specialized INGOs has stimulated demand for expertise and contributed to expectations of professionalization. These two dynamics are difficult to tease apart empirically since they both involve changes over time and could mutually reinforce each other. However, it is worth noting that our study focuses on INGOs during the post-Cold War era, whereas research on rationalization usually takes a longer view, covering both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries if not longer. As we shall see, foundings of specialist American INGOs began to rapidly overtake foundings of generalist American INGOs largely during the past thirty years.

4.3 Developing a Theory of INGO Specialization

To recap, leading or gatekeeper INGOs tend to have generalist missions. Previous research has largely ignored the question of why some INGOs choose broader missions than others. Moreover, IR theories about other global governance actors appear to be ill-equipped to adequately answer our question. In this section, we take a population perspective to develop new empirical expectations about variation in INGO mission breadth.

4.3.1 The Trade-offs of Specialization

An INGO's decision about whether to specialize in its mission has important implications for its performance.[32] Specialization can generate clear advantages such as using resources more efficiently, appealing more effectively to certain donors and other audiences, and developing stronger expertise on particular issues or tactics.[33] INGO practitioners are very attuned to these advantages. In our survey of American INGO staffers, 57 percent of respondents reported that specialized INGOs are more effective than generalists; only 8 percent thought specialists were less effective, and 35 percent assessed them as the same. According to interviews with leaders in the field, "singleness of focus" is an important attribute of INGO effectiveness.[34]

But generalism also has benefits. Large organizations can draw on a wider range of resources, better capture economies of scale, and block other organizations from expanding into their turf. Their missions are arguably more ambitious, and they tend to be more flexible and adaptable since many activities are potentially consistent with their missions. Interviews with INGO leaders revealed that they also consider large organizations and those with global scopes as potentially effective; some interviewees observed that the latter are successful because "the scope of their programs is very large" and "they have developed the political networks around the world that allow them to be very effective."[35]

Organizational ecology devotes considerable attention to the environmental conditions that favor generalism vs. specialism. To illustrate the distinction between generalists and specialists, Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman consider two populations that differ with respect to a single environmental dimension, E, but are alike along all others.[36] Figure 4.1 describes the competitive positions (i.e., fitness) of two groups of organizations in this environment. Organizational subpopulation A – the generalists – occupies a very broad niche and covers the market center, meaning that it can sustain itself with a wide range of resources. For INGOs, resources can involve various funding sources

32 Olzak and Uhrig (2001); Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2019).
33 Mitchell (2014, 81–82); Shibaike (2023).
34 Ibid. (44).
35 Quoted in Mitchell (2012, 45, 47).
36 Hannan and Freeman (1977, 947).

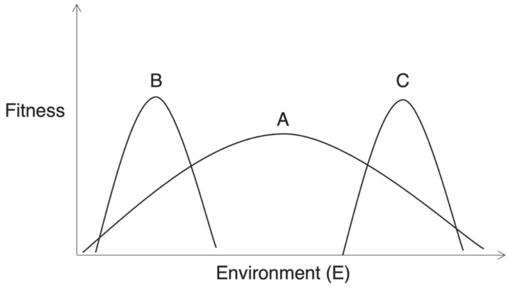


Figure 4.1 Fitness functions for specialists and generalists
Notes: This figure is adapted from Hannan and Freeman (1977).

(including governments, IGOs, foundations, other INGOs, firms, and individuals) as well as other types of resources that may be pertinent for survival (e.g., media attention, policy influence, staff, volunteers, and authority). By contrast, subpopulations *B* and *C* – the specialists – concentrate their fitness in narrow bands of resources.

Although generalism and specialism can be considered on multiple dimensions, our dimension of interest is INGO mission breadth. Figure 4.1 highlights the trade-offs involved in choosing between a generalist and specialist mission. Whereas a generalist organization can in theory survive by drawing on a wide range of resources (thus reducing its risk of mortality, all else equal), a specialist organization is better able to exploit its environment when the environmental conditions match its niche. This difference in efficiency is due to the amount of excess capacity each organization maintains. For the generalist organization, being able to survive in a wide range of conditions requires the flexibility to alter programming as the environment changes over time. This type of adaptation is possible because the generalist INGO's mission is broad enough to support efforts in multiple settings and on various issues. A generalist organization will, for example, find it easier to pursue new funding opportunities that target specific types of program activities as they arise since its mission is more compatible with diverse approaches. Yet this breadth comes at a cost: Generalist organizations must maintain staff and operations that cover more geographic areas and skill sets, sacrificing efficiency for flexibility. Specialist organizations do not maintain this excess capacity and are thus more efficient under favorable conditions; they are more likely to fail if the environment changes substantially in a way that does not match their focus.

Returning to our earlier comparison of the WWF and Pandas International, each organization supports itself with a distinct resource pool within the overall population of American conservation INGOs. The WWF in the United States, a generalist INGO that would be an organization in subpopulation *A* in Figure 4.1, raised $433 million in 2022 from a range of funders. Individuals were the most important source of donations (contributing 31 percent of annual revenue), but WWF-US also received large donations from corporations like HP, foundations like the Bezos Earth Fund, governments like that of Colombia, and others.[37] By contrast, Pandas International is a specialized INGO that has more in common with organizations in subpopulations *B* and *C* in Figure 4.1. It has a much smaller annual income and a narrower set of funders. In 2021, it raised around $330,000; its largest revenue source was panda "adoptions." Other funding sources included events, merchandise sales, and panda-themed birthday parties.[38] Although Panda International has far fewer resources than the WWF, we can imagine that it draws resources from a niche segment of the public that is interested in supporting international conservation through individual actions but that is not already tapped out by larger organizations such as the WWF.

4.3.2 Hypotheses about Specialization

Given the trade-offs associated with specialization, under what conditions are INGOs more likely to choose a specialist mission? Drawing on insights from organizational ecology, we offer two answers. The first focuses on the importance of population density. Recall that at low levels of density, organizational populations are more collaborative than competitive. As a result, entrepreneurs may boost the legitimacy of a new organizational form by founding a new INGO when there are low levels of density. In populations that are already dense, however,

[37] WWF International, "2022 Annual Report," 2022, page 28. Available at https://files.worldwildlife.org/wwfcmsprod/files/FinancialReport/file/257wfcvxs7_AR2022_FINALPAGES_1_25_FPO.pdf?_ga=2.174392676.750397744.1685458692-996653750.1667957481 (last accessed May 30, 2023).

[38] Pandas International, "2021 Annual Report," 2021, page 8. Available at www.pandasinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/PI-Annual-Report-2021.pdf (last accessed May 30, 2023).

creating a new organization adds competition. One possible response to these competitive pressures is for fewer INGOs to be founded as density reaches higher levels, as we showed in Chapter 3. Another is that INGO entrepreneurs will try to minimize this competition and increase their chances of survival by distinguishing their organization from other groups.[39] This type of behavior can be thought of as a form of cooperation since it involves INGOs mutually adjusting to each other with the goal of fulfilling unmet needs and working in complementary ways.[40] As Sarah A. Soule and Brayden G. King explain with respect to social movement organizations (SMOs), for example, "increasing competition makes SMOs attempt to find some unique way to address their particular issue or to frame their goal or claim."[41] Their analysis (focused on New York State) demonstrates that high levels of density are correlated with tactical specialization in SMOs, a finding further supported by Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni's research on transnational environmental SMOs.[42]

In the focus groups and interviews we conducted for this book, most INGO leaders suggested that dense environments were not good for founding new organizations, which is consistent with our findings in Chapter 3. Yet they noted that such populations could still be hospitable for new specialized groups. Founders are attentive to concerns around density when making decisions about specialization. For example, in *Batman Saves the Congo*, Alexandra Cosima Budabin and Lisa Ann Richey extensively analyze actor Ben Affleck's decision to found an INGO called the Eastern Congo Initiative in 2010. Similar to the example from Rob Mather cited earlier, one expert involved described the process as incorporating extensive background research, stating, "It's as though they're casting around for what would be a good issue for Ben to pick up on … which there aren't many other people

[39] Unlike in the previous chapter, we do not theorize a curvilinear relationship between density and specialization because we do not expect initial increases in density to necessarily encourage generalism in the way that we theorize they will encourage further foundings by enhancing the legitimacy of the organizational form. We do not see a strong theoretical reason why legitimation should discourage specialization, although there could be such a relationship in practice.
[40] Keohane (1984, 53); Abbott, Green, and Keohane (2016, 263).
[41] Soule and King (2000, 1576).
[42] Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2019, 396).

working on."[43] This account suggests that one particular advantage of selecting a Congo-specific geographic scope was that the country hadn't already been "claimed" by another celebrity, like Sudan, South Africa, or Malawi were perceived to have been.[44] Budabin and Richey conclude that by founding an organization geographically specialized in Congo, "Affleck sought to distinguish himself from other celebrity humanitarians and to carve out a specific territory."[45] Nina Hall describes a similar process where the founders of international digital advocacy group Avaaz developed a business plan in 2007–2008 that identified an "important global niche" that was not being filled, despite the proliferation of national-level digital advocacy groups.[46] Many practitioners we spoke with similarly emphasized the importance of new INGOs being "distinctive," "bringing unique value," and "avoiding duplication." For example, the director of impact at a peace and security INGO headquartered in the United States noted:

> I do think it's sometimes hard for new NGOs like 501(c)(3)s to get established, but I have seen effective new organizations that are responding to a very specific need during the early days of the pandemic, [with] people coming together to create a small organization specifically focused on getting out masks and gowns to medical providers.[47]

New niche groups like Health Tech Without Borders and TeleHelp Ukraine have been lauded for being "able to offer nimble responses" such as telemedicine appointments "to the emerging, evolving needs of Ukrainians" in the wake of Russia's 2022 invasion.[48] Despite a crowded humanitarian INGO population with many well-known groups like the International Rescue Committee providing emergency

43 Interview cited in Budabin and Richey (2021, 86).
44 Budabin and Richey (2021, 87).
45 Ibid.
46 Hall (2022, 57–60).
47 Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 13, 2022.
48 Jarone Lee, Aditya Narayan, Jacqueline A. Hart, and Mark C. Poznansky, "Ukraine's 'Dunkirk' Moment: Small NGOs Need Help to Avert a Humanitarian Disaster," *The Hill*, December 12, 2022. Available at https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3771258-ukraines-dunkirk-moment-small-ngos-need-help-to-avert-a-humanitarian-disaster/ (last accessed December 21, 2022).

assistance, there were still opportunities for new groups to be created, especially given the influx of international assistance to help Ukraine.

A second population-based explanation of the choice to specialize focuses on the importance of resource partitioning in response to market concentration. As Glenn R. Carroll explains, in concentrated markets (where a large portion of resources are controlled by a small number of actors), large organizations will compete with one another to gain control of the market "center."[49] This market center for INGOs reflects how certain countries and issues consistently receive more attention and support than others. Since there are significant economies of scale associated with many types of INGO work, generalist INGOs benefit from in-house business development, contracts, technical, and monitoring and evaluation teams that work across multiple projects, lowering their cost per project. Yet large INGOs leave other, more peripheral portions of the market relatively uncontested, which may open up opportunities for specialist organizations to gain a foothold. Specialists can more efficiently offer certain kinds of niche products and may appeal to a unique donor base due to status, technological, geographic, or organizational form differences.[50] Many practitioners we interviewed emphasized that organizations entering crowded markets may choose to specialize to avoid directly competing with dominant generalists. One INGO practitioner in the humanitarian sector advised would-be founders:

> I think [founding a new organization] is going to be very difficult.... They're going to first have to have a niche, try to find a niche. It's going to be impossible for someone to come in and say, we want to be holistic and do multiple stuff. If they come in with something that's really innovative and that does link to private philanthropy or corporate capital and speaks to young generation, they might have [a chance].[51]

Our focus on resource partitioning in the INGO community is supported by similar observations in other corners of global governance.[52]

[49] Carroll (1985).
[50] Negro, Visentin, and Swaminathan (2014).
[51] Interview with an executive at American humanitarian INGO, October 8, 2021, by Zoom.
[52] Related dynamics of resource partitioning have been observed in several other organizational sectors, including both firms and social movements. See Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) and Soule and King (2000).

Kenneth W. Abbott, Jessica F. Green, and Robert O. Keohane explore a similar dynamic in their study of global governance actors, noting that growth in the founding of "generalist" IGOs has slowed even as smaller organizations – such as private transnational regulatory organizations – are still growing in number.[53] Aseem Prakash and Mary Kay Gugerty consider a similar phenomenon by emphasizing the importance of INGO product differentiation in competitive markets,[54] while Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni uses resource partitioning as a lens for understanding "strategic differentiation" among transnational advocacy groups working on environmental issues.[55] Drawing on these insights, we consider how resource partitioning may affect INGOs' mission breadth.

We suggest that resource partitioning is also more likely when an INGO sector is economically concentrated. In concentrated populations, generalists occupy the market center, thus new actors are likely to thrive and secure resources in more peripheral segments of the market. Therefore, we expect concentration to increase the likelihood that a new INGO will choose a narrower mission to attract sufficient resources to sustain itself. This process may help explain why we observe a relatively consistent share of specialists in each American INGO sector in our data (Table 4.1).

4.4 Collecting Data on Mission Breadth

To test these hypotheses, we collected new and original data on the mission content of US-based INGOs. As discussed in Chapter 1, we study American INGOs because they are by far the largest group of INGOs globally. This focus also supports our research design because American INGOs share a common funding and regulatory environment, and unusually complete data is available on them from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS).

4.4.1 Coding Mission Breadth

We used the data from the NCCS as a sampling frame for identifying American INGOs, whose missions we then coded. The NCCS

[53] Abbott, Green, and Keohane (2016).
[54] Prakash and Gugerty (2010, 18).
[55] Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2019).

publishes information that US 501(c)(3) organizations report to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).[56] Following our approach in Chapter 3, we collected information about the mission content of a sample of 868 INGOs active in four sectors covered by the NCCS data – conservation, civil society and democracy, global health, and humanitarianism. For conservation INGOs, we collected information on the complete population since it is relatively small, and we wanted to explore variation across issue areas. For the other populations, we collected information on a random sample of organizations.

We worked with trained research assistants (RAs) to code the *geographic* and *programmatic scope* of each organization in our dataset.[57] Our primary source of information on INGOs' activities is Guidestar, a public interface that contains information on most IRS-registered nonprofit organizations based on their tax filings.[58] In the event of limited, outdated, or no information on Guidestar, we consulted organizations' official websites and – when necessary – third-party sites to obtain information about their missions. Information could not be found for about 15 percent of the INGOs in our sample, likely because those organizations died, never had very substantial operations, or both. Two RAs coded each mission to increase the reliability of our measures. The coders had high levels of agreement: Both reached the same conclusion about geographic and programmatic scope for more than 90 percent of the organizations in our dataset.

[56] Specifically, we used the NCCS Core PC File from 2012 to select our sample. This dataset includes organizations that filed Form 990 in that year. At the time that we began our research project, the NCCS released customized and proprietary data extracts to researchers for a fee, and 2012 was the most current year of data that was available. Although the NCCS has more recently released its data publicly, and we analyze this data in Chapter 3, we used a proprietary data extract to create the sampling frame for our original dataset of American INGOs' missions. Since 2012 is already a year characterized by slowing growth rates overall, as shown in Chapter 3, it is able to shed light on the dynamics of interest in this chapter. To provide a more up-to-date glimpse into mission specialization, Chapter 1 discusses more recent data on INGO missions that we coded using information from the Yearbook of International Organizations in 2022. See Union of International Associations (1953–2023).

[57] Online Appendix §2.3 details our coding process. See Bush and Hadden (2025a).

[58] Available at http://www.guidestar.org (last accessed February 19, 2018).

Geographic scope refers to the area in which the organization focuses most of its attention in terms of activities, services, or impact. We coded this variable using three categories: single country (i.e., the INGO worked in one other country besides the United States), regional (i.e., the INGO worked in multiple other countries beyond the United States that are part of one region, such as sub-Saharan Africa), and global (i.e., the INGO worked in multiple other countries beyond the United States that are part of multiple regions). Pooling across all four sectors, about half of the INGOs were single country (51 percent); 12 percent were regional and 37 percent were global.

Programmatic scope refers to the issues on which the organization focuses most of its attention. Single-issue organizations work on one issue within the overall sector, such as the protection of a particular species (e.g., pandas) within conservation or the treatment of a particular disease (e.g., malaria) within global health. Multi-issue organizations work on multiple issues within the sector or do not specify a specific issue in their mission. Roughly equal numbers of INGOs in our dataset were single- and multi-issue organizations. Figure 4.2 indicates

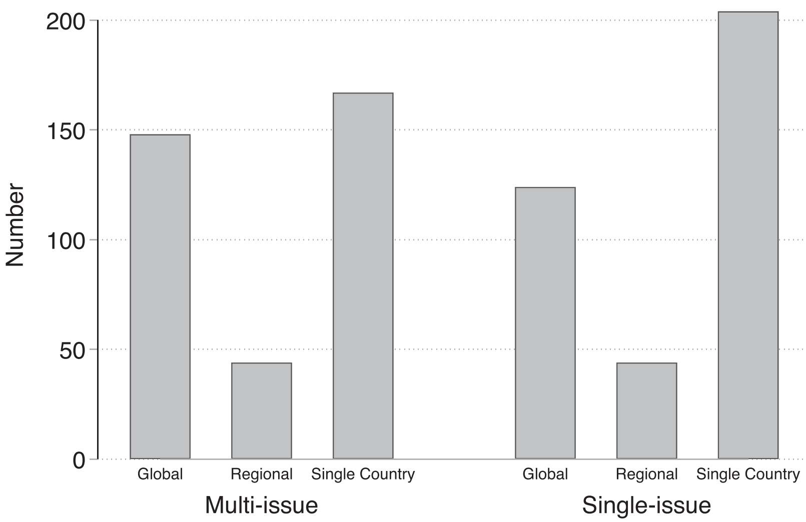


Figure 4.2 The relationship between programmatic and geographic scope among American INGOs

Notes: Based on authors' original coding of American INGOs from the NCCS sample ($N = 868$).

that programmatic scope is correlated with geographic scope: Multi-issue organizations are more likely to work in more parts of the world than single-issue organizations. That said, it is also common for single-issue organizations to work globally and for multi-issue organizations to work in a single country.

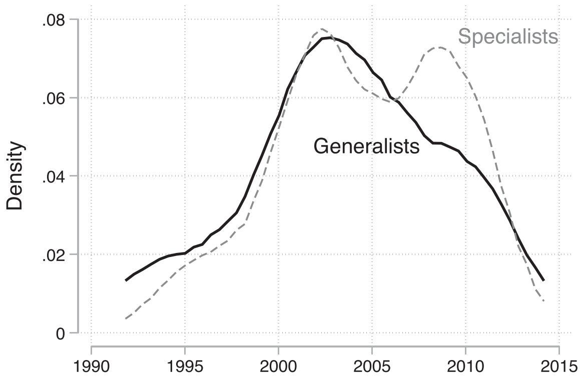
We define *generalist organizations* as those that are global and multi-issue, and all others as *specialist organizations* based on their limited geographic or programmatic scope (or both). This approach parallels the way that organizational ecologists use these concepts since generalist INGOs are theorized to be able to survive in many environments, whether geographic or in terms of the issue space, and can draw on more diverse resources. Using this definition, 80 percent of the INGOs in our dataset were coded as specialists.

4.4.2 Descriptive Trends

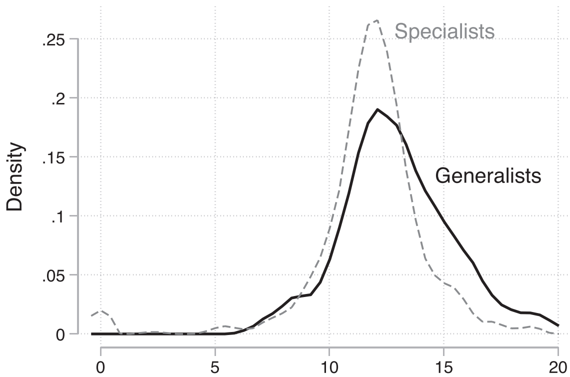
Figure 4.3 establishes that generalist INGOs tend to be older and richer than specialists. On average, generalist INGOs are about five years older than specialist INGOs, and the mean revenue at the time of founding is approximately \$38 million vs. \$3 million, respectively. Both differences are highly statistically significant. Other characteristics – such as staff quality and professionalism – are less easily quantified but also likely vary with mission breadth. For example, we suspect that organizations with larger budgets and broader scopes tend to be more centralized.[59]

In line with Chapter 3's findings, generalist foundings are declining. Figure 4.4 plots the total number of generalist and specialist INGOs in the United States by year.[60] It indicates that generalist and specialist INGOs initially had similar growth rates, but these diverged around the turn of the twenty-first century: Specialists experienced very rapid growth, while generalists experienced slower growth. Foundings of generalist INGOs in the United States have now started to plateau. If our theory is correct, this pattern can be understood as a response to density and concentration.

[59] Wong (2012).
[60] This figure does not include foundings of INGOs that may have died prior to 2012, which is the NCCS year on which we base our data collection.



(a) INGO Founding Years for Generalist and Specialist INGOs



(b) INGO Revenues (logged) for Generalist and Specialist INGOs

Figure 4.3 Differences between generalist and specialist INGOs in age and revenues
Notes: Figures show kernel density estimates. Based on authors' original coding of American INGOs from the NCCS sample ($N = 868$).

4.5 The Correlates of Specialization

We employ a statistical analysis of our original data to investigate the conditions under which INGO entrepreneurs choose specialization. The outcome variable in the analysis is whether an organization is a specialist.

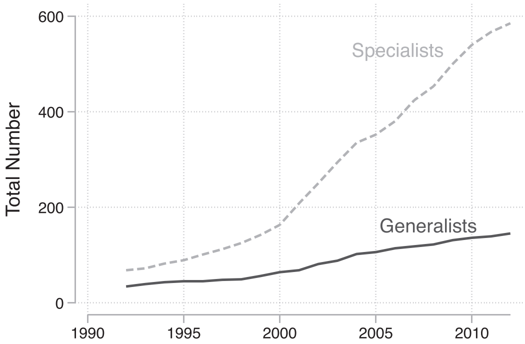


Figure 4.4 Total generalist and specialist American INGOs, 1992–2012
Notes: Based on authors' original coding of American INGOs from the NCCS sample.

4.5.1 Measurement

Our explanatory variables capture core attributes of organizations, as well as the environmental conditions they faced at the time of their founding. We first hypothesize that as sector density increases, foundings of INGO specialists will increase. As in Chapter 3, we measure density as the number of American INGOs that were "alive" in the sector in the year before an organization was founded; a living organization is defined as an INGO that has been recognized by the IRS and has not died. As in Chapter 3, we also use lags for density of 2–6 years instead of our standard one-year lag to account for the possibility that changes in density take longer to affect INGOs than one year.[61]

Next, we posited that as sector concentration increases, foundings of INGO specialists will also increase. This hypothesis draws on the logic of resource partitioning. Similar to Chapter 3, we measured a sector's concentration by calculating the percentage of total resources controlled by the four largest INGOs in each issue area during the year of founding. When calculating the concentration, we measured resources using the total revenue that INGOs reported to the IRS in the sector in a year.

[61] The results associated with these robustness checks and the others described in this chapter are available in Online Appendix §4.2. See Bush and Hadden (2025a). Density is positively and significantly related to specialism using two- and four-year lags. It loses statistical significance at conventional levels with the six-year lag, although it remains positively signed.

In addition, we include variables to capture other potential drivers of specialization. Entrepreneurs founding an INGO during times of uncertainty may prefer a broader orientation that makes them less vulnerable to fluctuations in the market.[62] One dimension of uncertainty is resource volatility. A major new funder may enter an INGO population (as when the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation launched in 2000) or exit it (as when Bernie Madoff bankrupted the Justice, Equality, Human dignity and Tolerance [also known as JEHT] Foundation in 2009). There are also events like recessions and stock market crashes. We measure resource volatility in an issue area as the absolute value of the percentage change in reported revenue from the previous year for the sector as a whole. Other events can also create environmental uncertainty, such as shifts in political priorities and the legal environment. We employ an indicator variable for the three years following September 11 (i.e., 2002, 2003, and 2004) to capture the uncertainty introduced by this major historical event for American INGOs.[63]

We also include three indicators of organizational attributes that prior theory suggests may be related to specialization. The first is an organization's total revenue in 2012 (log transformed) since wealthier organizations are less likely to be specialists. Second, we include an indicator variable capturing whether an INGO's main office is located near the US capital (i.e., the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia). Commentators often note the importance of being located "inside the Beltway" – within the Capital Beltway highway that encircles Washington, DC – for NGOs to acquire the resources, contacts, and expertise needed to become major players in their issue areas

[62] Writing a generalist mission statement is not the only way an INGO might attempt to weather uncertainty. Other studies point to considerations such as partnerships with firms. See Waerder et al. (2022).

[63] September 11 may have also affected INGO fundraising, especially for Muslim INGOs. See Khan (2012), Thaut, Stein, and Barnett (2012), and Wasif (2023). Our analyses are robust to using alternative measures, including using two or four years after September 11. To the best of our knowledge, there were no other major events around 2001 that would introduce variability into American INGO populations that were not related in some way to September 11. Of course, given the blunt nature of our indicator variable, we cannot determine whether it is the terrorist attack itself, policy responses to it, or broader social and economic shifts that are driving any relationship between September 11 and generalism.

(and thus, perhaps, generalists).[64] The third indicator variable captures whether the organization is religiously affiliated, since faith-based INGOs may be more likely to be specialists since these organizations are often relatively small and volunteer driven.[65] We include these organizational-level measures because they may allow us to more precisely estimate how environmental conditions at founding influence INGOs' strategic choices by controlling for other relevant factors.

4.5.2 Results

Since the outcome is binary (i.e., an INGO is either a specialist or not), we employed linear probability models, which are ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with binary outcome variables.[66] In all models, robust standard errors are clustered by issue area. For visualization in Figure 4.5, we standardize resource volatility and density so that their mean values are 0 and their standard deviations are 1. As Figure 4.5 shows, the baseline model examines the relationship between three organizational variables and the likelihood of specialization – size, location, and religious affiliation. We find that larger INGOs are less likely to be specialists, as expected. Location and religious affiliation do not predict generalism, contrary to some conventional wisdom about American INGOs.

The full model in Figure 4.5 adds variables that capture the environmental conditions at the time of founding. We add indicators for population density, concentration, and environmental uncertainty. We find that, consistent with our theory, population density is associated with an increase in the probability of specialization. Also as hypothesized, INGO founders are much more likely to choose specialization when an INGO sector is more concentrated. Finally, there is evidence that founders are less likely to found specialist organizations when the environment is uncertain, as measured by the years following September 11 and resource volatility, although the former coefficient estimate does not reach statistical significance. Accounting for population-specific dynamics by adding sector indicator variables as a robustness check does not materially change the significance or

[64] For example, Disney and Gelb (2000, 66).
[65] Schnable (2021).
[66] Our results are similar when we instead use logistic regressions.

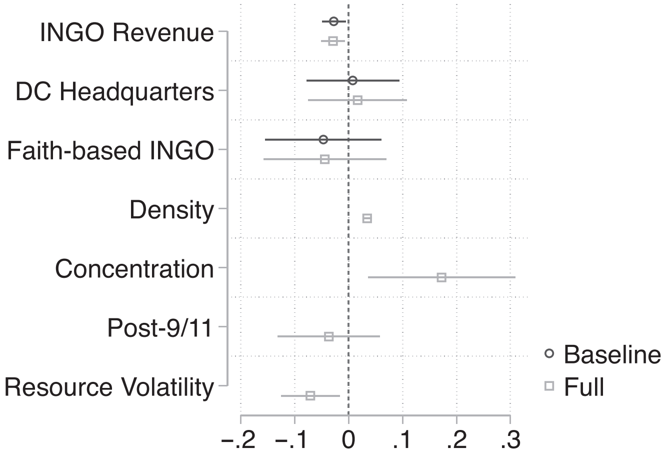


Figure 4.5 The correlates of American INGO specialization
Notes: Based on models that estimate the likelihood of an organization specializing in a given population-year using linear probability models. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are shown. *N* = 628 for the baseline model and 626 for the full model. *INGO Revenue* is logged. *Density* and *Resource Volatility* are standardized. *Density* and *Concentration* are lagged by one year. Online Appendix §3 reports the results in a table (Bush and Hadden, 2025a).

direction of the coefficient estimates for density or concentration. The main results are also robust to controlling for the INGO's founding year, which we include because older organizations have had more time to expand their missions.

4.6 Mission Choices among Humanitarian INGOs

To further test our theory, we examine American humanitarian INGOs' decisions to specialize in their missions. Humanitarianism refers to "the impartial, independent, and neutral provision of relief to those in immediate danger of harm."[67] Humanitarian relief is provided to the victims of both human-caused disasters (i.e., violence and conflict) and natural disasters. It entails emergency assistance, such as providing food, water, shelter, and immediate health care. Although the boundaries of humanitarianism are much debated, key actors in

[67] Barnett (2005, 724).

the field have increasingly sought to address the root causes of conflict, which can bring their work closer to that of other issue areas.[68]

NGOs are by far the most common type of humanitarian actor; they represent about two-thirds of all the actors in the field according to the Humanitarian Organisations Dataset[69] and dominate many relief efforts, like the case of the Asian Tsunami mentioned in Chapter 1. Other relevant actors include governments, IGOs, members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and firms. Similar to their prevalence in the INGO landscape more generally, American groups dominate the INGO field (representing 39 percent of humanitarian INGOs globally), and humanitarian INGOs are overwhelmingly based in the Global North.[70] As we detail in Section 4.6.2, the resource environment for humanitarian INGOs includes governments, IGOs, other INGOs, private foundations, firms, and individuals.

Our case study explores whether humanitarian INGOs specialize to increase their odds of survival in response to density-induced competition. The nature of humanitarians' work arguably discourages specialization. Since humanitarianism generally seeks to provide relief where it is needed, the field's core principles (including neutrality and impartiality) encourage geographically broad missions. Moreover, we suspect that the demands associated with supplying aid after natural disasters may lead to fewer differences in how INGOs provide international relief – with a common broad emphasis on the delivery of food, shelter, and water sanitation – compared to the more varied activities that INGOs working on (for example) human rights or civil society and democracy pursue, which often pick between activities such as advocacy campaigns, trainings, and observation and reporting. The approach of INGOs working in the latter issue areas greatly depends on whether the target country is autocratic or a consolidated democracy (at an extreme, North Korea vs. Finland). Thus, because humanitarianism can be seen as an unlikely case for specialization from

68 Ibid.; Roth (2019, 267).
69 Egger and Schopper (2022, 5–6). Calculated by combining NGOs and NGO federations.
70 Calculated using data from the Global Database of Humanitarian Organizations, available at www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/projects/gdho (accessed May 26, 2023).

the perspective of existing theory, if we find evidence of our hypothesized causal mechanisms, it will provide additional support for our theory.[71]

As described in Chapter 3, humanitarian INGOs represent the densest population of American INGOs considered in this book. We expect the humanitarian INGO population's density to encourage new entrants to specialize via mechanisms of niche finding. On the other hand, humanitarianism is not unusually concentrated relative to other American INGO sectors, which our theory predicts will make specialization via resource partitioning relatively less common. The four largest American humanitarian INGOs in terms of revenue hold a smaller proportion of the population's resources than the four largest American INGOs in most of the other populations we examine in this book.[72] Given these mixed characteristics, we expect to find support for our first hypothesized mechanism – that density-induced competition drives specialization as a form of niche finding – but are somewhat ambivalent about whether we expect to see resource partitioning as an important mechanism.

As with our case study in Chapter 3, we draw on both interviews with practitioners and published primary and secondary sources, including the large IR literature on humanitarianism. We interviewed sixteen individuals at humanitarian INGOs of a range of sizes – including staffers at prominent INGOs such as Mercy Corps and Save the Children – and levels of mission breadth.[73] Our sampling frame focused on identifying people who founded the organization or served in an executive role when possible.

4.6.1 An Overview of Humanitarianism

According to Michael N. Barnett, "the current consensus is that [humanitarianism] emerged in the 18th century because of the growing impact of moral sentiments."[74] Broader shifts in religion and society

[71] Lieberman (2005); Seawright and Gerring (2008).
[72] Humanitarianism is still quite concentrated with a four-firm concentration ratio of 34 percent as of 2019, the latest year in our analysis, but it is less concentrated than other three American INGO populations included in our analysis that year.
[73] For more details on our interview methods, please see the Appendix.
[74] Barnett (2018, 334).

prompted people to begin considering the concept of "humanity" and the obligations it entails toward others and ourselves. When people are suffering, the standard is to voluntarily show compassion.[75]

Monika Krause dates the "invention of modern humanitarianism" to 1863, when the forerunner organization to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was created.[76] Swiss banker and philanthropist Henri Dunant, who had observed the carnage of the Battle of Solferino while on a business trip, assembled a committee of five Swiss men who sought to help the war wounded. Over time, the ICRC has become a renowned organization that is not quite an IGO or an INGO and has won the Nobel Prize three times. Today, it describes its work as follows:

> The work of the ICRC is based on the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols, its Statutes – and those of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – and the resolutions of the International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The ICRC is an independent, neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. It takes action in response to emergencies and at the same time promotes respect for international humanitarian law and its implementation in national law.[77]

How to periodize the history of humanitarianism is debated, but Krause argues that the first phase continued for the next 100 years and included the founding of many well-known INGOs, especially in the aftermath of the world wars. Save the Children (founded in 1919 in the United Kingdom) sought to provide aid to children in need, including in the former Central Power countries; the International Rescue Committee (founded in 1933 in the United States) had the goal of facilitating escape for refugees fleeing fascism in Europe; Oxfam (founded in 1942 in the United Kingdom) aimed to deliver food to Greeks suffering under German occupation and the British blockade; and the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (later known

75 Ibid.

76 Krause (2014, 101). While the conventional history of humanitarianism in IR (which we draw upon here) centers on Western actors, recent research draws attention to non-Western, alternative conceptions of humanitarian action. See, for example, Carruth (2021) and Slim (2022).

77 See ICRC, "The ICRC's Mandate and Mission." Available at www.icrc.org/en/mandate-and-mission (last accessed May 26, 2023).

as CARE; founded in 1945 in the United States) was created to deliver "care packages" to Europe. Explicitly religious humanitarian INGOs, including Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran World Relief, and World Vision, were also created during this period. These large organizations constitute the field's "behemoths," which contrasted with the more specialized "butterflies" that emerged later.[78]

The second phase of humanitarianism began in 1971 when French members of the Red Cross split off from the ICRC to form MSF[79] over the ICRC's conduct during the Nigerian civil war. The ICRC believed the principle of neutrality meant that its members must not condemn atrocities committed by the Nigerian government, which had instituted a blockade in famine-stricken Biafra. MSF's founders objected and instead pledged their commitment to the principle of *témoignage* (bearing witness) – in other words, to speak out about abuses in the treatment of civilians when merited.[80] The growth in what "humanitarianism" encompasses has continued.[81] The debate about its meaning has arguably facilitated greater diversity in the humanitarian field in terms of its relationship to international law,[82] human rights,[83] and development.[84]

We focus on the third phase of humanitarianism, which began in 1989.[85] This phase has been characterized by expansion, institutionalization, professionalization, and politicization.[86] Humanitarianism has increasingly come to resemble a field with a common set of "rules of the game."[87] The collapse of Cold War rivalry in international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the growth of civil conflicts increased both the supply of and demand for humanitarian action. Yet humanitarian efforts during this period were often perceived as failing to deliver. Although some earlier networks and efforts at coordination precede this period (e.g., InterAction, a membership-based alliance

78 Swidler and Watkins (2017).
79 Krause (2014, 104).
80 Barnett (2009, 648–649).
81 Roth (2019, 267).
82 Krause (2014, 107).
83 Barnett (2018).
84 Slim (2000).
85 Krause (2014, 107).
86 Barnett (2009).
87 Deloffre (2024).

of humanitarian INGOs, was founded in 1984), such initiatives grew substantially beginning in the 1990s in response to shortcomings in humanitarianism. The UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (founded in 1992), Humanitarian Practice Network (founded in 1994), People in Aid (founded in 1995), and Humanitarian Accountability Project (founded in 2003) are just a few examples of the initiatives that sought to make humanitarian INGOs more accountable and effective in the wake of perceived failures in Rwanda, Kosovo, and elsewhere.[88]

4.6.2 The Resource Environment

Funding for humanitarian INGOs from state and intergovernmental sources expanded considerably during our period of study.[89] The United States is the most important donor, especially for American INGOs but also for other INGOs.[90] We consider this government funding the market "center" for humanitarian INGOs. Not all organizations can successfully compete for such funding or want to do so. Accepting funding from states and IGOs usually involves reporting requirements and other demands that are best suited to professionalized INGOs. It also shapes INGOs' reputations in ways that they may perceive as positive or negative.[91] A handful of prominent humanitarian INGOs rely heavily or even exclusively on private funding sources. At the extreme is MSF; more than 97 percent of its total budget of €1.9 billion in 2021 came from private donations, including from more than seven million distinct individual donors, firms, and foundations.[92]

There is also heterogeneity in the resource environment, which humanitarian INGOs can exploit through niche-seeking behavior. For example, faith-based organizations are more common in the humanitarian space than in other INGO sectors. Examples include some well-known generalists – such as World Vision (a Christian INGO)

88 Deloffre (2016).
89 Barnett (2011, 123–124).
90 Stroup (2012, 37–39).
91 Whereas Dunantist INGOs are outside and critical of the state, Wilsonian INGOs perceive greater compatibility between their efforts and states' foreign policy goals. See Barnett (2005).
92 See Médecins Sans Frontières, "Financial Independence and Accountability." Available at www.msf.org/reports-and-finances (last accessed May 31, 2023).

and Islamic Relief (a Muslim INGO) – as well as many smaller organizations without significant name recognition.[93] These groups can fundraise through places of worship and tap into other networks that may not already be exhausted. It is also common for new, specialist INGOs to be formed in the wake of crises reported in the news; these groups can similarly tap into underserved corners of the resource environment. Writing about "competitive humanitarianism" in Sri Lanka in the wake of the 2004 Asian Tsunami, for example, Jock Stirrat observed, "One of the striking features of the relief effort was the presence of a horde of small, often newly formed, foreign organizations with little if any experience in disaster relief but motivated by a strong humanitarian impulse that 'something had to be done.'"[94]

People we spoke to for this project reiterated that the resource environment in humanitarianism is highly competitive. One director at a humanitarian INGO based in the United States said:

> So in the humanitarian space, there's huge competition between organizations. Huge cutthroat, ruthless competition for resources and space. And I was in the Kutupalong refugee camp with the Rohingya refugee response. This had 650,000 people in a couple months. And literally NGOs would go out to the distant subdistricts in that and literally plant their sign and say, "We're here." You would literally send out groups to plant a flag in your little territory so other NGOs in your sector would not set up there regardless of whether you have the capacity to meet that need.[95]

As we discuss in what follows, the competitive resource environment contributes to a variety of INGO decisions, including those concerning how specialized organizational missions should be.

4.6.3 Concentration, Density, and Specialization

Our theory identifies two factors that encourage specialization – concentration and density. Historical data on the sector's concentration is not available, but we know the first two phases of humanitarianism had relatively low population densities. As such, the founding of generalist INGOs such as Oxfam, CARE, and Mercy Corps during

[93] Roth (2019, 269); Austin et al. (2022).
[94] Stirrat (2006, 14).
[95] Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 13, 2022.

this period fits with our theory.[96] These INGOs had to navigate two world wars, the Cold War, the rise of intra-state conflict, technological change, and other shifts during the twentieth century. Being generalists may have helped them pivot geographically and in other ways given the uncertain environment.

Generalist INGOs during this early era benefited from their appeal to a broad and diverse resource base. For example, Murray D. Lincoln, the first president of CARE, approvingly described the organization as "big from the start."[97] Analysts attribute at least some of CARE's early success to its "flexibility" and specifically to how it "experimented a great deal" in an environment that was both "an open field and a testing ground."[98] Similarly, Save the Children – the work of which remains focused, as its name suggests, on helping children in need – nevertheless has a broad mission: "In the United States and around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm."[99] It works globally in the areas of health, education, and violence. According to one staffer, although the organization has adapted to the times – changing strategies to reflect developments in terms of "technology and the function of the international community" – it has nevertheless tried "to stay faithful to [its] birth" in terms of pursuing its mission.[100]

In later years, when the humanitarian population was denser, INGOs were more likely to engage in niche finding to identify specialized missions. For example, the Partnership for Supply Chain Management (PFSCM) is an American INGO created in 2005 as a collaboration between two existing INGOs – Management Sciences for Health and JSI Research & Training Institute – in response to an identified need in USAID's supply chain. Its mission, which Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer Erin Seidner described to us in an interview as "certainly unique,"[101] was to "help donors,

[96] Although some of these organizations initially had specialized missions, they expanded relatively swiftly to work globally and on multiple issues.
[97] Lincoln (1960, 205–206).
[98] Wieters (2017, 179).
[99] Save the Children, "Our Mission." Available at www.savethechildren.org/us/about-us (last accessed April 6, 2022).
[100] Interview with David Barth, Vice President of International Programs, Save the Children, via Zoom, December 9, 2021.
[101] Interview with Erin Seidner, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer, PFSCM, via Zoom, June 15, 2021.

governments, nonprofit organizations, and humanitarian agencies achieve their public health goals through cost-saving procurement, efficient logistics, pharmaceutical-grade storage, and real-time shipment tracking."[102] Thus, although PFSCM works globally, it remains a relatively specialized INGO due to its programmatic focus on procurement and supply chain management. According to Seidner, the organization's focus has contributed to its success; she noted, "it's really important to have a well-thought-out mission. It's important to have a targeted mission."[103] Likewise, the Uganda Fund (also known as the Fund for War-Affected Youth in Northern Uganda) was created in 2006 to serve a specific function: It distributed grant funding to Ugandan organizations that were supporting the needs of children and youth affected by the war that were difficult traditionally for US-based donors to identify and support.[104]

A number of the people we spoke to indicated that pursuing a specialized mission was advantageous for new organizations given the field's recent population density. One interviewee with substantial experience as a humanitarian indicated that specialization was one of the noteworthy developments she had observed: "I think in my years, I've mentioned over twenty years, the innovation that I'm seeing is that organizations have become more specialized."[105] An individual who had worked as a humanitarian since 2004 provided the following advice to a potential INGO founder:

> I think it's important to have a good mapping of what already exists, so that you're not walking in and trying to reinvent the wheel. There's already so much out there but ... there's certainly still room for more, and for more innovative and different organizations to enter this market.[106]

Paul Bode, the Vice President of Global Operations at Child Fund International, echoed similar themes. He noted several new INGOs that he perceived as being especially effective, such as Aflatoun

[102] PFSCM, "Who We Are." Available at https://pfscm.org (last accessed April 6, 2022).

[103] Interview with Erin Seidner, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer, PFSCM, via Zoom, June 15, 2021.

[104] Interview with Brenda Peace, Uganda Fund, via Zoom, June 8, 2021.

[105] Interview with director at an American humanitarian INGO, via Zoom, June 24, 2021.

[106] Interview with staffer at an American humanitarian INGO, via Zoom, July 15, 2021.

International, a child-focused organization working on financial literacy issues founded in 2005:

> I think for the type of broad-based organization like we are and that the other big ones are, I think it will be very difficult to start off at this moment. Where you see that new organizations have entered and are being successful it is those that all target a specific group of children.[107]

These comments support the conclusion by researchers Jutta Joachim and Andrea Schneiker that establishing a clear brand is a key step for professional humanitarian INGOs in the current environment.[108]

Although many of the comments we heard from humanitarian INGO professionals about the virtues of specialization related to the importance of responding to need and not duplicating existing efforts, some interviewees highlighted organizations' inability to secure funding in a crowded population with an overly broad mission, hinting at the importance of resource partitioning. One seasoned professional with experience in multiple humanitarian organizations advised would-be founders to consider, "What is it that you're bringing that is truly new and innovative and is going to engage donors in a new way?"[109] Another person we spoke to cautioned, "As much as I think new organizations are needed to challenge, it also does divvy up the funds more. And so, you won't be able to do as much."[110] A new entrepreneur directing her efforts within an existing organization could therefore be more impactful according to this view. These reflections align with an earlier finding by Taylor B. Seybolt that a "lack of differentiation" among humanitarian INGOs contributes to competition and survival problems.[111] Indeed, many of our interviewees described the humanitarian INGO population as "crowded" and "competitive." Coordination and collaboration among humanitarian INGOs is operationally important in a crisis environment (e.g., for transporting and storing aid materials),[112] yet the population of humanitarian INGOs has often been riven by conflict over access to funding and visibility.

107 Interview with Paul Bode, Child Fund International, via Zoom, July 16, 2021.
108 Joachim and Schneiker (2018, 177).
109 Interview with executive at American humanitarian INGO, via Zoom, October 7, 2021.
110 Interview with director at American humanitarian INGO, via Zoom, November 12, 2021.
111 Seybolt (2009, 1036).
112 Moshtari (2016).

This dynamic raises the question of whether coordination can overcome competitive pressures, an issue to which we return in Chapter 6.

Specialized missions are not without drawbacks. Many practitioners and analysts view them as hampering organizations' adaptability because they appeal to a relatively narrow slice of the resource market. As one interviewee noted, organizations with generalist missions can be helpful because they "tend to bend and flex and reinvent themselves as the need arises."[113] For example, when Congo experienced a famine in 1960, Oxfam moved beyond its original strategy of providing emergency food relief to attempt to address some of the root causes of the famine.[114] Despite this shift in programming, Oxfam remained committed to its ideology of "solidarity" with impoverished individuals and groups.[115]

Several scandals early in the twenty-first century generated significant financial losses and uncertainty for Oxfam. After revelations of sexual exploitation in Haiti, for example, Oxfam lost its funding from the British government via the Department for International Development.[116] Further revelations of abuse in Oxfam's work in the Democratic Republic of Congo exacerbated the situation. Yet the organization's mission remained the same even as it reorganized as a confederacy and shifted its operational headquarters to Nairobi, Kenya.[117] In 2020, during a subsequent transformation, Oxfam closed eighteen country offices (which employed approximately 1,500 staff) in order to invest more in fragile and conflict-affected states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, and Yemen under a new chief executive officer (CEO), Danny Sriskandrajah.[118] Such a

113 Interview with Brenda Peace, Uganda Fund, June 8, 2021, via Zoom.

114 Black (1992, Ch. 4).

115 Stroup (2012, 76).

116 See Kenneth Rawlinson and Robert Booth, "Oxfam Faces Losing Funding as Crisis Grows Over Abuse Claims," *The Guardian,* February 11, 2018. Available at www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/11/oxfam-staff-raise-concerns-over-charity-vetting-processes-haiti-abuse (last accessed July 11, 2023).

117 Oxfam International, "Our History." Available at www.oxfam.org/en/our-history (last accessed April 7, 2022).

118 "Danny Sriskandarajah on Oxfam's Transformation and the Future of INGOs," From Poverty to Power Podcast, June 11, 2020. Available at https://soundcloud.com/fp2p/danny-sriskandarajah-take-2 (last accessed June 7, 2022).

dramatic change – in both geography and program emphasis – was made possible in part by the organization's broad mission.

More recently, the ICRC and well-known INGOs including MSF have been pushed out of Syria and into neighboring countries such as Jordan, despite the country's clear need during the civil war.[119] The Syrian government limited humanitarian agencies' access, and the UN Security Council was unable to provide a workaround in many cases. Our interpretation is that global INGOs like MSF have been able to make these types of geographic shifts in part because their mission breadth makes them flexible. Organizations defined by working in a specific country or type of country cannot leave in response to violence without fundamentally altering their mission.

As noted earlier, humanitarianism is not an especially concentrated American INGO population. Yet the people we spoke to did not necessarily perceive it as decentralized. In 2004, Save the Children CEO Charles MacCormack noted the field's "competition" and observed, "Today, roughly 200 NGOs operate in the realm of emergency and crisis response, yet there really are only about a dozen major players. In fact, six or seven organizations account for 80 or 90 percent of global humanitarian relief."[120] However, the qualitative evidence suggests practitioners are more concerned about density than concentration, per se. Our interviewees from small humanitarian INGOs often noted the market power and outsized influence of larger organizations such as Save the Children or World Vision. Medium and smaller organizations find it difficult to secure donor funding in this environment. Thus, the strongest qualitative evidence that we found in terms of the environmental factors that favor specialization related to density-driven niche finding rather than concentration-driven resource partitioning.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we argue and show that certain environmental conditions favor mission specialization, while others do not. As we hypothesize, when organizational populations are dense and concentrated, founders are less likely to choose generalist missions; such

119 Scott (2022).
120 MacCormack (2004, 5).

markets encourage specialized missions as a means to maximize the likelihood of organizational survival. The analysis also shows that when the environment is unpredictable, founders are more likely to seek out wide mission niches; volatile and uncertain environments require adaptability and flexibility to survive, and one way of being flexible is for an organization to adopt broad issues, approaches, or locations. We support these claims using evidence from an original dataset of American INGOs' mission statements. Environmental conditions at founding help explain mission scope even when we control for organizational attributes that might be predicted to affect generalism, including size, geographic location, and religious affiliation. A case study of humanitarian INGOs further illustrates the hypothesized mechanisms, particularly demonstrating the importance of density-driven niche finding.

Our approach sheds light on mission breath, a crucial but understudied strategic decision. When organizational environments are highly dense, entrepreneurs with ideas for INGOs with broad-based missions may well be crowded out. This conclusion contrasts with rational design and bureaucratic approaches to the study of IGOs; future research should explore using density dependence to explain mission breadth in other populations of global governance actors.

Our chapter demonstrates that specialization has clear advantages for a new organization entering the dense and economically concentrated markets common in the United States today. But observers have debated whether the dominance of specialists is ultimately positive or negative for global governance outcomes. We believe specialism can be an important way to introduce innovations into dense organizational populations. These innovations can be scaled through partnerships with generalist organizations, and have the potential to improve endangered species monitoring or advocacy, for example.[121] We also echo the concern of some practitioners that the scale of the present global challenges and the interconnectedness of many issues – like climate change with development, human rights, humanitarianism, and more – highlight the need for INGO missions that are broader than ever before. In Chapter 6, we consider the potential for coordination and organizational partnerships to fill this gap.

[121] Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2020).

5 *The Spreading Out of INGOs*

In 2008, American college student Seth Maxwell met a friend for coffee in Los Angeles to discuss her recent service trip to Uganda. The next day he went to a film screening about poverty in the developing world. And the third day he attended church, where his pastor talked about the need for mission work to provide safe, clean water. As Maxwell later described:

> Three consecutive days changed everything ... Over the next several months, through my own research and several uncanny, seemingly chance encounters that could only be described as God at work, I met with some of the most prominent individuals and organizations exploring ways to provide solutions to this problem, and knew I had to take action.[1]

Maxwell got together eight friends, and with the $70 they were able to raise among themselves they bought water bottles from a local grocery store. The friends took the bottles to Hollywood Boulevard, where they handed them out to passersby with a request for a donation toward providing clean drinking water in the developing world. By the end of the day, they had raised $1,700 – enough to rehabilitate one freshwater well.

Buoyed by this success, Maxwell and his friends started to think bigger. He reflected, "It was then that we realized that, despite the huge number of water organizations and agencies that exist to address the global water crisis, NOBODY was activating students – young people – around this issue. So, we created the Thirst Project."[2] Thirst Project believed it had found a niche by focusing on raising money in middle schools, high schools, and colleges. This strategy seems to have

[1] Thirst Project, "Our Story." Available at https://thirstproject.org/about/our-story/ (last accessed July 23, 2023).
[2] Ibid.

worked: Since its creation, Thirst Project has raised millions of dollars to fund 3,300 projects, providing over 500,000 people with safe, clean water.[3]

Thirst Project has distinguished itself from other international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) focused on water in another important way as well. It initially funneled most of its donations to other INGO partners, but as it grew, Thirst Project decided to move its programming teams in house. And as part of that strategic decision, the leadership team chose to concentrate its efforts on a single country: The Kingdom of Eswatini in Southern Africa (formerly Swaziland).

On the face of it, the decision to focus on Eswatini instead of another country that is needier or more attention-grabbing is puzzling. The country is extremely small, with a population of just over a million people. In 2012, the World Bank reported that 64 percent of its population had access to basic drinking water services, much more than many other countries in the region, such as Uganda (43 percent) or neighboring Mozambique (44 percent).[4] And Eswatini is not well known to most Americans, the primary donors and supporters. Thirst Project describes the decision as follows:

> While many nonprofits have been making progress on solving the water crisis, no organization has focused efforts specifically in one country, with the goal of bringing an entire nation clean water. The eSwatini [sic] project will work as a case study about the positive effects of bringing clean water to a developing country and will demonstrate benefits such as improved education and heightened development.[5]

Thirst Project's outreach materials repeatedly highlight that its work in Eswatini is part of "What Makes Thirst Unique."[6] And by focusing on a small country, the organization could claim to "do what no one

[3] Thirst Project, "Our Impact." Available at https://thirstproject.org/about/our-story/ (last accessed July 23, 2023).

[4] World Bank, "DataBank: People Using at Least Basic Drinking Water Services." Available at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.H2O.BASW.ZS?end=2012&locations=SZ&start=2000 (last accessed July 23, 2023).

[5] Thirst Project, "Kingdom of eSwatini." Available at https://thirstproject.org/about/our-story/ (last accessed July 23, 2023).

[6] Thirst Project Club Program, "What Makes Thirst Unique." Available at https://hammerdownoprf.weebly.com/uploads/1/6/6/3/16631190/thirst_what_makes_thirst_project_unique.pdf (last accessed July 23, 2023).

has ever done before," in a way that it presumably couldn't in a bigger country, like Uganda or India.[7]

Thirst Project is specialized, both programmatically and geographically, and thus illustrates the dynamics studied in Chapter 4. Yet Thirst Project's story also exemplifies another trend in INGO decision-making, which we address in this chapter: INGO leaders are increasingly avoiding overseas countries that are crowded "hotspots" and seeking out new geographic niches for their work. From many perspectives, this trend is surprising. If INGOs are focused on organizational effectiveness, why wouldn't they channel their scarce resources to where the need is greatest? For issues like clean water, which often have important economies of scale, why not focus on countries or regions where people live in particularly dense communities, where a project can reach more people? More broadly, why is this strategy of finding a geographic niche so popular?

This chapter highlights an important reason why American INGOs are increasingly seeking out new geographic niches: Many once-popular countries are now "saturated" and can no longer easily support more INGOs. Even in places with strong ties to the United States and relatively robust civil society protections, observers and decision-makers have expressed a growing wariness about INGO density. For example, critics have argued that the INGO sector is too large in countries including Haiti[8] and Kenya.[9] (Over)saturation can lead to a variety of operational problems. Reflecting on the influx of INGOs following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, a representative from World Vision noted "the absence of coordination coupled with a lack of an accountability mechanism led to challenges like duplication of activities and saturation in some project sites."[10] Even before

[7] Ibid.
[8] Kristoff and Panarelli (2010).
[9] Cecelia Lynch, "Kenya vs. NGOs: Round 3?" Critical Investigations of Humanitarianism in Africa, February 11, 2015. Available at www.cihablog.com/kenya-vs-ngos-round-3/ (last accessed July 27, 2022). The domestic nongovernmental organization (NGO) population in Kenya is also extremely crowded and is in some ways difficult to distinguish from the INGO population. See Brass (2016, 78).
[10] Eliza Villarino, "World Vision: Lessons from Haiti," *Devex*, January 11, 2013. Available at www.devex.com/news/world-vision-lessons-from-haiti-80096 (last accessed July 27, 2022).

the earthquake, Haiti was referred to as a "republic of NGOs"[11]; one of our focus group participants with extensive experience in the humanitarian field described Haiti as experiencing a "proliferation of NGOs."[12]

Post-disaster response efforts often generate similar criticisms of INGO population density, as already mentioned in Chapter 1 with respect to the 2004 Asian Tsunami. For example, after Cyclone Pam tore through Vanuatu in 2015, it experienced what was described as a "torrent of NGOs, surge staff, and the aid sector's labyrinthine coordination,"[13] which was said to have overwhelmed local response efforts. Multiple large INGOs criticized their own efforts in Vanuatu and called for greater coordination.[14] Concerns about INGO saturation can encourage or at least provide justification for the legal restrictions on INGO activities that have spread in recent years.[15] The Indonesian government, for example, prohibited INGOs from operating without a local partner after the devastating 2018 earthquake and tsunami in Central Sulawesi Province, citing concerns about foreign organizations' overlapping mandates and operational confusion.[16]

Given the growing possibility that American INGOs will consider key foreign countries too crowded, our theory predicts that – much like Thirst Project – they will increasingly seek out new (less dense) geographic niches. Building on the previous chapters, this approach

11 Kristoff and Panarelli (2010).

12 Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 13, 2022.

13 Irwin Loy, "Aid Reform in the Pacific held up by Power, Purse Strings, and Trust," *The New Humanitarian*, November 14, 2017. Available at www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2017/11/14/aid-reform-pacific-held-power-purse-strings-and-trust (last accessed July 27, 2022).

14 Rebecca Barber, "One Size Doesn't Fit All: Tailoring the International Response to the National Need Following Vanuatu's Cyclone Pam," Report published by CARE International, Oxfam International, Save the Children, and World Vision International, June 2015. Available at https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/reflections-on-cyclone-pam_whs-v2.0-report.pdf/ (last accessed July 27, 2022).

15 Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2016); Bromley, Schofer, and Longhofer (2020); Glasius, Schalk, and De Lange (2020); Chaudhry (2022).

16 Irwin Loy, "Why Indonesia's Rules on Foreign Tsunami Relief are Rattling the Aid Sector," *The New Humanitarian,* October 16, 2018. Available at www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2018/10/16/why-indonesia-s-rules-foreign-tsunami-relief-are-rattling-aid-sector (last accessed July 27, 2022).

highlights that country-level population density is an important predictor of where INGOs choose to work, and thus how decisions about geographic siting might change predictably over time. This perspective complements previous research that has emphasized the importance of country need, funding, and political institutions as drivers of whether (and where) INGOs engage.[17] These factors are clearly important, but we suggest that they paint an incomplete picture. In particular, previous scholars have overlooked density-driven temporal shifts in INGOs' geographic decisions.

Similar to the argument advanced in Chapter 3, our approach in this chapter emphasizes the curvilinear effect of density – this time, on geographic decisions. When a country has low levels of INGO density, the presence of some INGOs demonstrates the feasibility of operating there and attracts more INGOs. However, after this initial population growth, a country's INGO population will become crowded, with fewer resources available for new INGO entrants. After this saturation point, further increases in INGO density will have a negative effect: The more INGOs that are working in the country, the more likely it is that a new INGO will be crowded out of the environment. We support this argument with a statistical analysis of original and existing data on INGOs' locations as well as a qualitative case study of conservation INGOs.

The chapter's findings have potentially important implications for our understanding of global governance. We demonstrate that, net of other influences, the uneven supply of INGOs across national contexts can be explained by the first half of the INGO density curve: INGO presence initially attracts more INGOs. But after saturation occurs, density will repel INGOs, leading them to seek their own geographic niches. INGOs are not simple aid chasers; they undertake cost–benefit analyses of working in environments with varying densities.

We emphasize that "saturation" does not necessarily imply that the country's needs have been met. This can happen in some cases, like in major relief efforts previously discussed where INGO activity outstrips local capacity to absorb resources. But perhaps more commonly, saturation occurs when additional INGOs anticipate that they will

[17] Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers (2005); Büthe, Major, and de Mello e Souza (2012); Hill, Moore, and Mukherjee (2013); Hendrix and Wong (2014); MacLean et al. (2015).

struggle to acquire the necessary resources to survive in an environment. Thus, if many countries are reaching their saturation points, we should expect to see greater geographic dispersion over time. INGOs significantly influence the countries where they work through service provision, advocating for policy reforms, promoting international norms, and providing technical expertise, among other things. Thus if American INGOs are spreading out globally, more countries may become exposed to Western-led economic and political networks, which could lead to both the diffusion of associated norms and practices and also potential political backlash. We elaborate on these points in the next section.

5.1 Why Geographic Choices Matter

An INGO setting up an office or maintaining staff in another country shapes political and social life there in at least three important ways.[18] First, INGOs are important service providers. They have played a growing role in delivering private and public foreign economic assistance.[19] Although this foreign assistance often comes with strings attached, governments are loathe to restrict it because it "help[s] them deliver services, relieve[s] budgetary pressure, and t[ies] them more closely to key international actors."[20] Second, INGOs can also provide technical expertise to national and local governments and socialize government employees to international practices, as has been the case on global health issues.[21]

Third, some INGOs are important channels for the diffusion of international norms and policy changes.[22] For example, when human rights INGOs are operating in a country, this draws international attention to abuses[23] and encourages domestic groups to engage in

[18] INGOs can engage with countries in various ways that do not necessarily involve a physical presence, such as by "naming and shaming" their human rights records or grading their performance in an international benchmark. INGOs' decisions about which countries to focus on in these ways fall outside the scope of the chapter.

[19] Büthe, Major, and de Mello e Souza (2012); Dietrich (2016).

[20] Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2016, 302).

[21] Murdie and Hicks (2013). See also Freyburg (2015) and Campbell, DiGiuseppe, and Murdie (2019) for other studies of INGOs' effects.

[22] Boli and Thomas (1999).

[23] Meernik et al. (2012).

protest.[24] A local presence of human rights INGOs also helps domestic activists mobilize to pressure governments to improve their human rights records.[25] When countries pass laws that prevent INGOs from operating, it can deter domestic civil society actors from advocating for political reform.[26] In these ways, the presence of progressive INGOs may promote countries' integration into the liberal world order. Yet INGO efforts to spread liberal norms have provoked unintended consequences, sometimes including a nationalist backlash to external interference[27] or a counter-movement of more politically conservative INGOs.[28] Such a backlash may be more likely when an INGO is physically located in a country.

5.2 Prior Research on INGO Geography

Even large INGOs lack the resources to set up operations in every country; they must therefore make hard choices about where to work. Our approach builds on a small body of research that has empirically examined the countries in which INGOs operate. These studies emphasize the importance of three considerations that are also highlighted in the literature on domestic NGOs' geographic choices *within* countries:[29] (1) a location's need, (2) how welcoming it is to domestic and international NGOs, and (3) the availability of resources to work there. We discuss each in turn.

First, INGOs seek out countries where there is a need for their activities. Research on large service-delivery INGOs shows that they are more likely to work in countries with greater need.[30] Examining US humanitarian and development INGOs, Tim Büthe, Solomon Major, and André de Mello e Souza analyze an original dataset of private aid allocation and conclude that recipient need is statistically and substantively the biggest determinant of where private aid goes.[31] Although

24 Murdie and Bhasin (2011).
25 Bell, Clay, and Murdie (2012).
26 Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2015).
27 For example, Gruffydd-Jones (2019).
28 Bob (2012); Ayoub and Stoeckl (2024b).
29 For example, Brass (2012); Dipendra and Lorsuwannarat (2022).
30 Moyer et al. (2024).
31 Büthe, Major, and de Mello e Souza (2012).

they examine where INGOs spend money rather than where they are geographically located, these outcomes are likely correlated.

Second, international NGOs seek out countries that are politically open to INGOs and relatively safe. Colin M. Berry et al. describe this in their study of how human rights INGOs' geographic choices are shaped by countries' "political opportunity structure[s]."[32] The legal environment is often a powerful barrier to INGO engagement.[33] Similarly, violence against humanitarian organizations is frequently intended to encourage them to leave.[34] Consistent with these findings, a survey of domestic NGO staffers in Cambodia finds that repression is viewed as a significant impediment to advocacy and service organizations' ability to achieve their objectives.[35]

Beyond the threat of crackdown, INGOs' geographic choices may also reflect their perception of where their work can have the greatest impact due to other indicators of how welcoming a country is. Even if a country has substantial objective need, its political environment may lead INGOs to believe they are unlikely to be able to make progress. Previous research suggests that INGOs may seek to work in contexts with low corruption, high stability, and important Western alliances, which may provide leverage for INGOs' activities.[36] Renewable energy NGOs are more likely to work in countries with higher levels of democracy, for example, even though these organizations are nominally apolitical.[37]

In a third consideration, INGOs seek out countries where they are able to secure funding and other resources to support their work. Need and political opportunity structure shape access to resources, but other factors also drive funding availability and potential, including donor states' political priorities. INGOs are increasingly important channels for the delivery of foreign economic aid,[38] and many large INGOs bid for and accept project funds from governments that require engagement in specific countries. For example, Mercy Corps generates as much as 90 percent of its revenue by securing government contracts

32 Barry et al. (2015, 89).
33 Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2015); Chaudhry (2022).
34 Narang and Stanton (2017).
35 Springman et al. (2022).
36 Büthe, Major, and de Mello e Souza (2012); Hendrix and Wong (2014).
37 MacLean et al. (2015, 726).
38 Dietrich (2016).

and awards to work in countries prioritized by donors such as the United States Agency for International Development and the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office.[39] Others, like Save the Children, have more diversified revenue streams but still generate a substantial portion of their funding from government sources.[40]

Recognizing the restrictions imposed by government funders, other organizations jealously protect their ability to make their own geographic (and other) decisions. For example, Médecins Sans Frontières, Amnesty International, and Greenpeace International generally do not accept government funding.[41] But working in a particular country may still require these organizations to fundraise from foundations, firms, other INGOs, or individual donors, many of which also prefer to fund programming in specific places.[42] Such funders may be interested in supporting work in countries that are more prominent or with which they have stronger personal connections through religious, ethnic, or other types of ties. As one INGO staffer told us with respect to private funders, "people just don't fund where they haven't been on vacation."[43] Of course, INGOs with multiple revenue streams may choose to use discretionary (rather than project-based) funds to work in less marketable locations.

INGOs' decisions about where to work also reflect other strategic considerations. The literature on naming and shaming highlights how INGOs' choices about which violations to publicize are based on patterns of global media attention and desire for organizational continuity in programming, among other considerations.[44] The desire to work in

[39] Audited financial statements are available at Mercy Corps, "Financial Information and Annual Reports." Available at www.mercycorps.org/who-we-are/financials (last accessed March 6, 2023).

[40] Save the Children, "Annual Report 2021." Available at www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/annual-report/annual-report/2021-annual-report/2021-annual-report-results-for-children.pdf (last accessed March 6, 2023).

[41] Though see Srivastava (2022) on Amnesty's evolving approach to government funding.

[42] Chaudhry and Heiss (2021).

[43] Interview with a senior staff member of American conservation INGO, by Zoom, June 13, 2022.

[44] Cooley and Ron (2002); Bob (2005); Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers (2005); Hendrix and Wong (2014); Chaudhry (2019).

highly visible places may be one factor that promotes crowding: Since 2022, attention has focused on Ukraine's humanitarian emergency at the expense of other contemporaneous "forgotten emergencies" such as the drought in Somalia.[45]

In summary, relatively few studies have sought to directly explain INGOs' decisions about where to operate globally and those that do tend to focus on organizations in a single sector, such as human rights or renewable energy.[46] And previous research is somewhat divided over whether country need, political opportunities, available funding, media attention, or other factors should most strongly attract INGOs. Our approach develops a different understanding of organizational incentives that treats INGOs' choices as interdependent: an INGO's decision about whether to work in a country will depend on other INGOs' previous decisions about working there. After developing this argument in the next section, we test it empirically alongside other relevant variables identified in previous research.

5.3 How Density Shapes Geographic Strategy

We argue that an INGO's decision about where to work depends on the density of countries' existing INGO populations. Here, we define a country's INGO population in terms of the number of foreign nongovernmental organizations of the same nationality that are already working there, defined further by the sector whenever possible. Although this population definition excludes domestic NGOs, we think this approach is appropriate for our analysis, as there is a great deal of cross-national variation in organizational forms, behaviors, and norms,[47] and domestic NGOs may have quite different structures, patterns of activity, and normative orders than international NGOs. During the time period of our study, domestic NGOs have typically struggled to compete with international NGOs for resources from foreign aid donors, who are a major source of revenue in most issue areas

45 Corinne Redfern, "How the Focus on Ukraine Is Hurting Other Humanitarian Responses," *The New Humanitarian*, July 7, 2022. Available at www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2022/07/07/Ukraine-aid-Russia-invasion-funding-donors (last accessed July 26, 2022).

46 Barry et al. (2015); MacLean et al. (2015).

47 Stroup (2012).

(although these dynamics may be changing due to trends in aid localization, as we discuss in Chapter 6). This approach also makes our analysis empirically tractable, as no systematic data source exists to document populations of domestic NGOs by country.

Similar to our argument about foundings presented in Chapter 3, we expect density to have a nonlinear effect on geographic location, reflecting an inverted u-shaped relationship between density and geographic choice.[48] Working in a country with very few other INGOs present may initially be difficult. INGOs provide one another with mutual support and encouragement in the early stages of their population growth. If major INGOs maintain offices in a country, others may consider it as well since INGO leaders gather information about how needy and welcoming countries are from their colleagues. Moreover, staff may learn from their peers how to work in the country, including how to legally register, recruit employees, and conduct their activities in a way that matches the needs and norms of the environment. Finally, international workers share many everyday social encounters across organizations that create a sense of belonging.[49] At low levels of density, we expect the presence of other INGOs to initially encourage other INGOs to engage in a country, as INGO staff help one another become more familiar with the national environment and its requirements.

But we anticipate that the relationship between density and INGOs' geographic decisions will shift as density increases. Countries eventually reach saturation in terms of the number of INGOs they can comfortably support. After that, further increases in density cause INGOs to be less likely to engage with a country. At higher levels of density, the presence of many INGOs can introduce competition for local employees, confusion about overlapping objectives, and programmatic redundancy, among other issues. In a focus group conducted for this study, a staff member of an education INGO described recruiting staff in Guatemala as competitive for some of these reasons, saying, "We have so few professionals that hiring the professionals to be part of the NGOs has become a competition ... specialists are taken from the little NGOs."[50] The founder of a humanitarian INGO in

[48] See also Hanegraaff, Vergauwen, and Beyers (2020).
[49] Mosse (2011); Autesserre (2014).
[50] Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 7, 2022.

Uganda raised similar concerns about populations being too crowded, telling us she would advise would-be founders:

> [T]hink about not going where everyone is, because there are certain areas where you go and there's no CSO [civil society organization] really doing anything and yet they should be doing something there. So they should focus, not concentrate in the same place as everyone is, and then duplicate the work.[51]

In dense environments, organizations may also find it more difficult to secure funding because too many other INGOs are applying for the same grants and contracts and soliciting donations from the same interested public. As a result, existing INGOs in a location may be motivated to engage in entry deterrence – actively discouraging other INGOs from working in a particular place. As a staff member at a humanitarian INGO with more than a decade of experience explained in a focus group we conducted for this book:

> [I]n the relief space where there's a crisis and a fire hose of money is going to get turned on in the next 6 weeks, getting to be the number one agency in your sector in that area is tremendously competitive. And not wanting other agencies to be able to get a foothold in your sector to meet that problem so that you can remain the de facto lead is super common.[52]

To be clear, high levels of density will not completely dissuade INGOs from working in countries that are attractive locations for reasons of need, openness, resources, or some combination thereof. This dynamic is why we observe situations (like those discussed in the introduction of this book) that are intensely competitive in ways that may have deleterious consequences for social welfare. Nevertheless, our argument is that INGOs anticipating this dynamic leads to a predictable trend: Increases in INGO density once a country has already reached its saturation point will be associated with fewer additional INGOs working there, whereas the initial increases in INGO density have a positive effect. As the old joke about a popular restaurant goes, "Nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded."[53]

[51] Interview with Brenda Peace, Uganda Fund, via Zoom, June 8, 2021.
[52] Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 7, 2022.
[53] We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this quote.

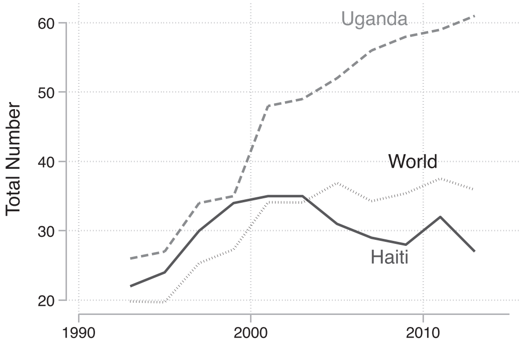


Figure 5.1 INGO density trends in Haiti and Uganda, 1993–2013
Notes: The data source is the Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset (Smith and Wiest, 2012; Smith et al., 2019). In addition to displaying the total number of American INGOs in Haiti and Uganda, this figure includes the mean total number of American INGOs globally, calculated by averaging across all countries in the dataset.

Cross-national differences in INGO population density can be stark, and the same national environments can vary quite a bit in population density at different points in time. Figure 5.1 depicts the total number of American INGOs located each year in Haiti and Uganda, which exhibit different trends in density over the post-Cold War period.[54] Haiti is frequently characterized as having too many INGOs; the number of American INGOs there grew rapidly throughout the 1990s, but plateaued and eventually declined by the late 2000s. The 2010 earthquake generated a brief spike, but the trend generally follows the inverted u-shaped pattern that characterizes population saturation. By contrast, the number of American INGOs working in Uganda steadily increased throughout the same period, indicating that population saturation was not reached in this larger country.

This argument builds on our discussion in Chapter 4 about missions and the importance of identifying a niche. As we argued there, INGOs may seek to distinguish themselves from their peers by stipulating a

[54] This figure uses data from the Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset (Smith and Wiest, 2012; Smith et al., 2019). As explained later in this chapter, this dataset includes a biannual coding of entries in the Yearbook of International Organizations. Because this biannual coding includes odd-numbered years, we start the analysis in 1993 instead of 1992, as we do elsewhere in the book.

specialist mission, such as by focusing on a particular geographic location or a narrow programmatic focus. But even if American INGOs are becoming more geographically narrow in their missions, a question remains about *where* they actually work. This chapter examines that question, exploring how increases in density encourage and then discourage INGOs from working in particular locations. For a single-country American INGO like Thirst Project, we are interested in why Eswatini was chosen as the location as opposed to some other country. And for an organization such as Freedom House that has a global mission and thus could in principle work in any or even every country, we are similarly interested in where it chooses to operate.[55] As of 2024, it maintains offices in "nearly twenty countries;"[56] this chapter addresses the factors that make a country more likely to be chosen to be part of that group. Our theory and empirical analysis therefore complement Chapter 4 by investigating what drives INGOs to work in some countries but not others at a given point in time.

We acknowledge that the search for geographic niches may operate somewhat differently in different issue areas. We expect INGOs in many issue areas to feel pressured to respond to major events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, even as identifying geographic niches characterizes their longer-term strategy. Because humanitarian and peace and security INGOs often focus on urgent disaster response and major conflicts, they may have less strategic ability to avoid highly dense and competitive country environments than other types of INGOs, especially if they have global missions. As one staff member at an peace and security INGO explained in a focus group, "You can't just not be active on major crises sequentially. You might be able to miss one but you can't miss three in a row."[57] This inability to mitigate competition by specializing in a particular geographic

[55] The organization states the following after "our mission": "Freedom House is founded on the core conviction that freedom flourishes in democratic nations where governments are accountable to their people. We speak out against the main threats to democracy and empower citizens to exercise their fundamental rights through a unique combination of analysis, advocacy, and direct support to frontline defenders of freedom." See Freedom House, "Ways to Give." Available at https://freedomhouse.org/ways-to-give (last accessed July 27, 2022).

[56] Freedom House, "About Us." Available at https://freedomhouse.org/about-us (last accessed February 12, 2024).

[57] Focus group conducted via Zoom, October 7, 2022.

niche has led to what they described as intense competition among conflict and humanitarian INGOs, where many organizations compete for the same pooled funds (see also Chapter 4 on competition among humanitarian INGOs). But other leaders in the humanitarian sector had different opinions about avoiding crowded locations. A staff member from the International Committee of the Red Cross stated in an interview, "we plan very carefully, we look at what others are doing to make sure we're not going to be bumping into each other and duplicating efforts."[58] Thus, niche-finding dynamics may apply to humanitarian organizations as well. As a staff member told us:

> I think before we were always like, "Oh, we need to have a presence in many countries because we're needed." . . . But now I feel like it's less about being in a lot of countries, it's really digging deep and being even in potentially fewer or the same countries if other agencies are complementing us in other countries.[59]

5.4 Where INGOs Work

To gather data on where INGOs work, we first return to the sample of 868 American INGOs that we introduced in Chapter 4. The sample was drawn from the National Center for Charitable Statistics' (NCCS) coding of all 501(c)(3) organizations in the United States filing Form 990 tax returns. It covers INGOs working on conservation, civil society and democracy, global health, and humanitarianism.[60]

Using this sample, we had research assistants (RAs) visit each organization's website around the start of 2020 to record in which countries the INGO reported programs or offices. As such, this measure captures both permanent offices and more temporary activities. The RAs found that 24 percent of the organizations in our sample had no website (potentially indicating that they no longer existed) or no relevant information about their geographic locations.

[58] Interview, Helen Durham, Director of International Law and Policy, International Committee of the Red Cross, July 30, 2021, by Zoom.
[59] Interview with executive at an American humanitarian INGO, October 8, 2021, by Zoom.
[60] Chapter 3 contains a fuller discussion of the NCCS data's strengths and limitations.

We also draw on the Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset (TSMOD), developed by Jackie Smith, Dawn Wiest, Melanie M. Hughes, Samantha Plummer, and Brittany Duncan.[61] The TSMOD contains a biannual coding of entries from the Yearbook of International Organizations (YIO) from 1953 to 2013.[62] As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, the YIO contains a less comprehensive list of American INGOs than the NCCS, which draws on US government tax records. However, it offers the advantages of a panel data structure and information on INGOs from a range of countries, not just the United States.

The TSMOD contains a subset of organizations in the YIO. It aims to include "international nongovernmental organizations defined by their explicit efforts to alter some aspect of the status quo."[63] It includes all major advocacy and service provision groups in the YIO. Among other organizational attributes, the TSMOD contains information on the headquarter country for each INGO, allowing us to identify American INGOs. The TSMOD does not directly record the countries in which INGOs work, but it contains data on the countries in which they "have members."[64] Following other research,[65] we treat "having members" in the TSMOD as an indicator that an INGO is "working in" a country, although it is arguably a weaker indicator than our original one. The two data sources reveal some interesting trends in the geographic choices of American INGOs. In our original data, we identified 190 countries in which American INGOs reported working as of 2020. The average country has around 22 American INGOs, and 75 percent of countries have fewer than 30. The United States is the densest country: 33 percent of American INGOs also have

[61] Smith and Wiest (2012); Smith, Plummer, and Hughes (2017); Smith et al. (2019).

[62] Union of International Associations (1953–2023).

[63] Ibid.

[64] In the TSMOD, an INGO "member" is a broad category: It can include other NGOs in a federated structure, individuals, project teams, political parties, national governments, banks, and other categories. Most organizations listed in the TSMOD report having a federated structure of memberships (25 percent), a structure for national and local organizations to be members (29 percent), or individual members (32 percent). Other types of membership are less common. The membership variable is missing for 21 percent of organizations.

[65] For example, Barry et al. (2015).

domestic programs. The top ten foreign countries with the highest density of American INGOs are Haiti, Kenya, India, Uganda, Mexico, Guatemala, Philippines, Tanzania, Peru, and China (Figure 5.2). This list includes both countries that critics allege are overrun by INGOs (e.g., Haiti) as well as large countries (e.g., China and India) that may attract INGOs due to having relatively strong needs, resources, or media coverage, among other considerations.

Most INGOs focus their work in one or a small number of countries; few have the capacity to be truly global even if they have a generalist mission with respect to geography. The American INGOs in our original data worked in an average of six countries, with a range of 1–172 reported. Consistent with our data on the prevalence of mission specialization from Chapter 4, 44 percent of organizations reported working in only one country beyond the United States,[66] and only 15 percent worked in over ten countries. Only eighteen organizations operated in more than fifty countries. If, as we hypothesize, INGOs need to strategically differentiate in their geographic choices due to increasing density, we should expect them to "spread out" to more countries over time. Figure 1.2 illustrates this trend toward dispersion among American INGOs from 1993 to 2013. We also examine the proportion of countries in the world with at least one American INGO during the full time period covered by the TSMOD (see Figure 5.3). If our argument is correct, we would expect INGOs to be concentrated in fewer countries earlier in the time series and to be more widely distributed later. As expected, the proportion of countries with American INGOs in the TSMOD steadily increased during the observed time period, reflecting a shift from 35 percent of the world's countries in 1953 to 95 percent in 2013. American INGOs are indeed "spreading out" to more countries. Of course, this trend could be due to factors other than population density, such as increases in the raw number of American INGOs or in the resources that permit INGOs to work in more countries. In what follows, we attempt to tease apart the influence of density and other factors.

[66] The data we collected on mission breadth for that chapter (as reported in Figure 4.2) indicated that 51 percent of INGOs had missions that specialized in only one country other than the United States.

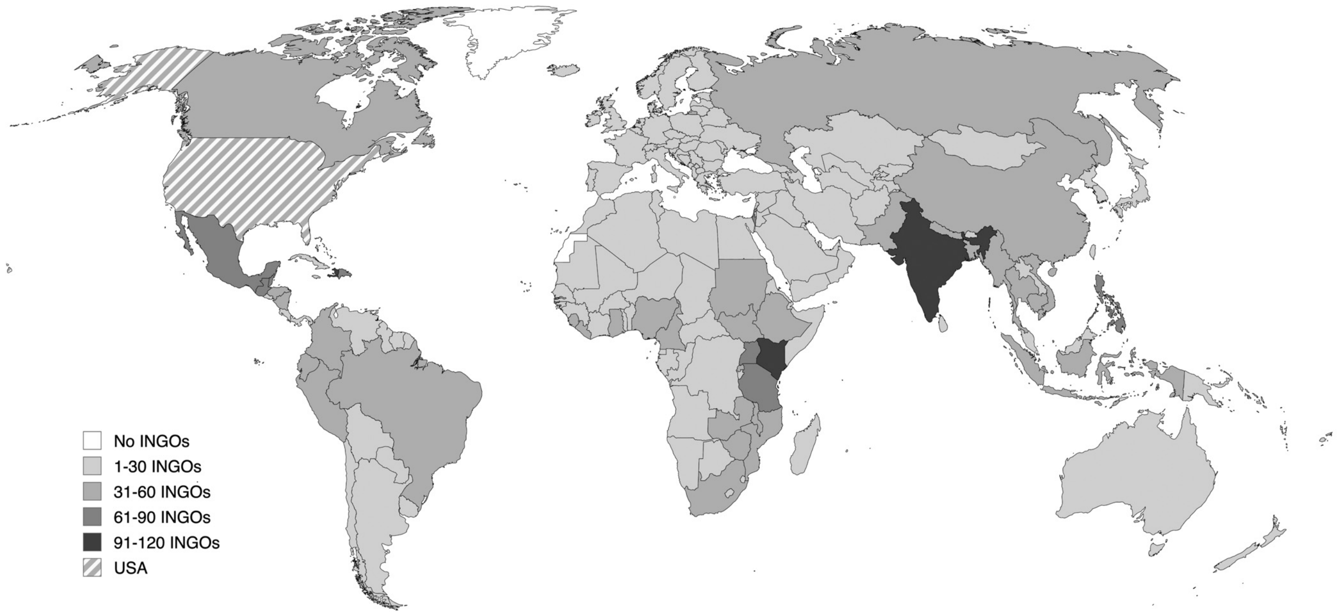


Figure 5.2 Density of American INGOs by country, 2020

Notes: Based on authors' original coding American INGOs' programs and offices collected from their websites. The sample of INGOs is from the NCCS and includes INGOs working in the fields of conservation, civil society and democracy, health, and humanitarianism as described in Chapter 4.

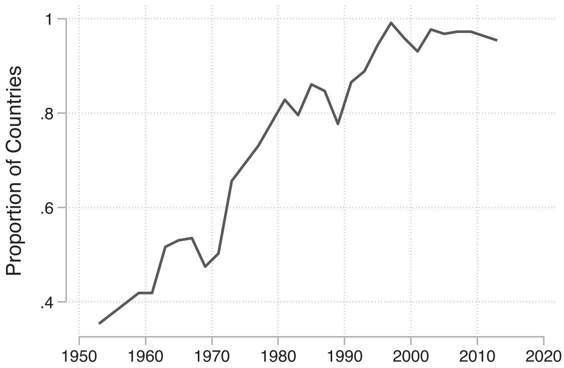


Figure 5.3 American INGOs' global spread, 1953–2013
Notes: The graph shows the proportion of all countries in the world that have at least one American INGO working there based on the TSMOD.

5.5 What Explains Where American INGOs Work?

We present two complementary analyses, first using our original data and then drawing on the subset of American INGOs in the TSMOD to conduct a longitudinal analysis. In both, we remove observations related to whether INGOs choose to work in the United States, which is consistent with our focus on American INGOs' *international* activities.

5.5.1 Original Data

Our key explanatory variable is a country's pre-existing INGO density. To measure it, we count the total number of all American INGOs in the previous time period and also square this variable to model the hypothesized curvilinear relationship. We standardize these variables for visualization so that their mean values are 0 and their standard deviations are 1. This count comes from the TSMOD data, which ends in 2013. Our theory anticipates a time lag between shifts in a country's INGO density and organizations' decisions about where to work. Since our original data collection began in 2020, this pairing is appropriate, though longer than our one-year lags in the main analysis in Chapters 3–4. Although we cannot use a shorter time lag due to the lack of more recent TSMOD data, we used a range of time lags (2–6 years) in Chapters 3 and 4 as robustness checks and did not find that the length of the lag matters significantly for the results.[67] We also note that because the TSMOD includes only a subset of American INGOs based on the YIO, subsetting it to create issue-specific measures of American INGO population density is not possible without too much missingness in certain populations.

The richness of our original data allows us to include covariates measured at the organization level, as in Chapter 4. First, we expect that wealthier INGOs will work in more countries. Second, we anticipate that INGOs that are more institutionalized and better connected politically (proxied by their location near Washington, DC) will operate in more countries. Finally, we predict that faith-based organizations will work in fewer countries because they may prefer to deliver services to individuals who share their faith.[68] We also include a measure of the INGO's geographic scope (single country, regional, or global), as we expect the choice to work in a particular country to be shaped by the breadth of the organization's mission.

At the country level, we control for the three main factors identified earlier – country need, a welcoming environment, and resources. All country variables are lagged by one year unless otherwise noted. To measure a country's need, we include measures of population and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita.[69] All else equal, we expect larger and poorer countries to have a greater need for INGOs' expertise and services. Both variables are logged to address skewness.

To measure how welcoming countries are, we include a measure indicating whether a country experienced significant civil society organization (CSO) repression from V-Dem.[70] We also expect countries

[67] We also find that there is a substantial correlation between the number of American INGOs reporting members in a country according to the TSMOD in 2013 and the number of American INGOs still working in that country in 2020 based on our original coding. The correlation coefficient is 0.51 for all countries, and 0.72 for countries in the Global South, which are the main focus of many INGOs' efforts.

[68] Alternatively, more missionary-driven faith-based INGOs may operate in fewer countries because they want to work in communities that are not already part of their religion.

[69] The source for these variables is Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), "Country–Year: V-Dem Full + Others v12" Dataset. See Coppedge et al. (2022). The original source for these variables is Fariss et al. (2022).

[70] Coppedge et al. (2022).

that are politically aligned with the United States to be more supportive of American INGOs and vice versa. We therefore include indicators for countries' past alliances with the United States.[71]

Finally, since American INGOs may seek to work in countries with better fundraising potential, we include the amount of US foreign economic assistance each country received.[72] To measure media and political attention – which may also affect fundraising potential from US foundations, firms, and individuals – we include the number of *New York Times* articles published about a country in 2019. Countries that are mentioned more frequently in the American news receive more attention and likely have better resources for INGOs, understood broadly.[73] For example, countries with larger diaspora populations living in the United States or cultural and linguistic similarity may tend to receive more attention and therefore have more potential for resource generation. Our media attention measure may also pick up on countries' needs (e.g., more coverage in the wake of natural disasters) or relationships with the United States (e.g., more coverage of US allies). Both the US aid and media attention variables are logged because they are skewed.

Unfortunately, our analysis does not include a control variable that captures the number of domestic NGOs that exist in a country because such a measure does not exist cross-nationally. It is plausible that countries with more domestic NGOs would be more attractive locations for INGOs since domestic NGOs can be important partners and implementers for many INGO programs. In general, we expect the country-level control variables discussed earlier to do a reasonable job of capturing the size of the domestic NGO population in countries, since countries that are poorer, smaller, and more repressive also tend to be less hospitable to domestic civil society activity.

We use linear probability models that estimate the probability that an American INGO is located in a country. Linear probability models are ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with binary

[71] Leeds et al. (2002). This variable comes from 2018, which is the latest year in the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions dataset.

[72] Data came from US Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook): Obligations and Loan Authorizations, July 1, 1945–September 30, 2019. Available at www.foreignassistance.gov/reports (last accessed September 25, 2023).

[73] Bob (2005).

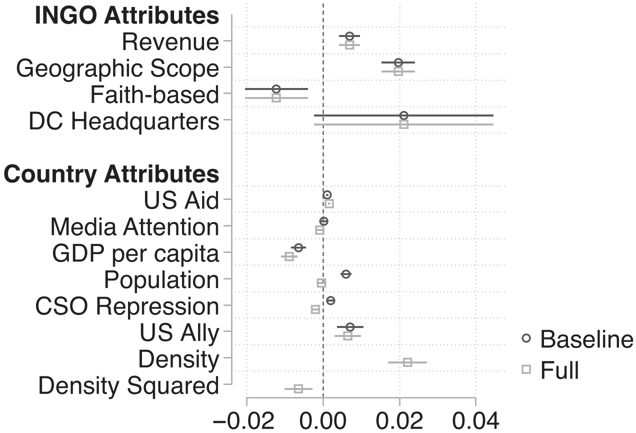


Figure 5.4 Correlates of American INGOs' geographic choices, 2020
Notes: Based on regressions that estimate the likelihood of an organization working in a particular country in 2020 using linear probability models. $N = 129,888$. Standard errors are clustered by organization. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are shown. *Revenue*, *US Aid*, *Media Attention*, *GDP per capita*, and *Population* are logged. *Density* and *Density* are standardized. All country-level attributes are lagged by one year. Data combine our original coding and information from the Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset. Online Appendix §3 reports the results in a table (Bush and Hadden, 2025a).

outcome variables. In all models, standard errors were clustered by organization.

As Figure 5.4 illustrates, in the baseline model, we find that INGOs with larger revenues and those with broader geographic missions are more likely to work in any given country, as expected. Faith-based groups are less likely, all else being equal. Having a base in Washington, DC is positively associated with our outcome, although the large standard error prevents us from estimating this relationship with confidence. Of the country-level variables, US aid, population, and US alliances are all positively associated with American INGO presence, and GDP per capita is negatively associated, as expected. Civil society repression is positively associated with our outcome in the baseline model, contrary to what we expected.

The full model adds our predictors related to a country's INGO population density. As expected, above and beyond other factors, an

American INGO's choice to engage in a country in 2020 is statistically significantly associated with the density of American INGOs engaged there in 2013. The relationship between density and an organization's choices is curvilinear: Initial increases in density encourage an organization to engage, up to a point at which further increases discourage it. The control variables in the full model generally have the same relationships with geographic choices as they did in the baseline model, with the exception that CSO repression is now negatively and statistically significantly signed, and the coefficient estimate for population is no longer statistically significant at conventional levels.

These results are robust to four types of tests.[74] First, we use an alternative estimation method – rare events logistic regressions, which address the issue that our outcome is a binary measure with mostly zeroes.[75] Second, we use additional controls – corruption, political stability, and democracy.[76] Third, we substitute a measure of US imports for US alliances and density measures that are based on all INGOs instead of ones that are based on American INGOs.[77] The count of all INGOs is based on the TSMOD and constructed in a similar manner to the count of American INGOs. We use this measure because it is possible that saturation in terms of funding, staffing, and other considerations involves INGOs of multiple nationalities. Fourth, we introduce indicator variables for the issue area and the organization, the latter of which provides a particularly demanding test since it allows us to examine the effect of density while holding constant all organization-level traits.

Overall, the full model suggests that INGOs' geographic decisions are affected by both organizational- and country-level factors. But because our models are not longitudinal, our measure of INGO density in 2013 may capture other country-level, time-invariant features that attract or deter INGOs. Our longitudinal models described in what follows help us better understand these factors.

74 Online Appendix §4.3 reports the results associated with these robustness checks (Bush and Hadden 2025a).
75 King and Zeng (2001).
76 These measures come from the V-Dem dataset. See Coppedge et al. (2022). The original source for the corruption and political stability measures is the Worldwide Governance Indicators. See Kaufmann and Kraay (2023).
77 The measure of US imports come from the World Bank. See World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) Data, available at https://wits.worldbank.org/ (last accessed April 4, 2024).

5.5.2 Longitudinal Data

We now examine the TSMOD alone as a time series to assess how American INGOs decided where to work during the available post-Cold War years, that is, from 1993 to 2013. The TSMOD contains 174 American INGOs, which include groups active in a range of topics within the "social change" category, including Food for the Hungry International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Pathfinder International, and the Rainforest Action Network.

Our measure of density is the lagged number of American INGOs that reported having members in a country. We also include that number squared to test our theory. Both variables are standardized for visualization purposes. In the main model, we use a two-year lagged measure of INGO density. In robustness checks, we use longer lags of 4–6 years to more closely approximate our approach in Section 5.5.1.[78]

As with our earlier analysis, we include both organization- and country-level covariates. At the organizational level, we are constrained by the availability of covariates in the TSMOD dataset, which itself is based on the YIO. Although we would like to include a direct measure of an organization's budget (similar to what we included in Figure 5.4), this data is not available. We instead include the organization's age. Since older organizations tend to have larger budgets, organizational age is a reasonable proxy for organizational size.[79] At the country level, we use the same measures and data sources as described in our previous analysis. Finally, we include a variable measuring the year of the analysis to capture any time trends.

As before, our analysis is run using linear probability models in which the outcome of interest is whether an organization has members in a country in a particular year. We cluster the standard errors by organization. The results displayed in Figure 5.5 support the main hypothesis and are quite similar to those in Figure 5.4. The full model establishes that the number of INGOs already in a country has a curvilinear relationship with an organization's decision to have members there in the year of analysis.

We also explore several alternative estimation methods. The results are similar if we use rare events logistic regressions. These results are

78 Online Appendix §4.3 reports the supplementary results described in this section (Bush and Hadden 2025a).
79 Hadden (2015) uses a similar approach.

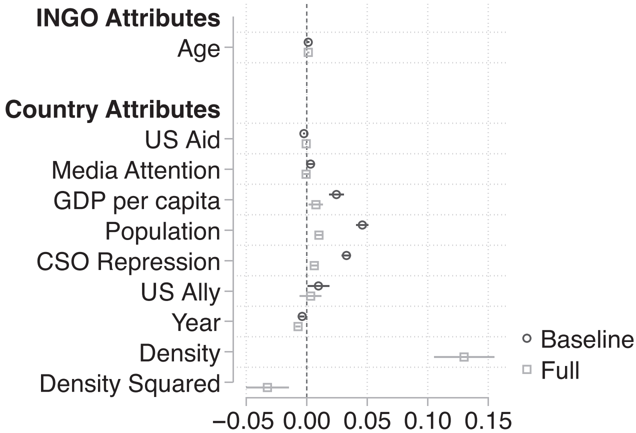


Figure 5.5 Correlates of American INGOs' geographic choices, 1993–2013
Notes: Based on regressions that estimate an organization's likelihood of working in a particular country-year using linear probability models. Standard errors are clustered by organization. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are shown. N = 383,889 for both models. *Revenue*, *US Aid*, *Media Attention*, *GDP per capita*, and *Population* are logged. *Density* and *Density Squared* are standardized. All country-level attributes are lagged by one year, except for *Density* and *Density Squared*, which are lagged by two years. Online Appendix §3 reports the results as a table (Bush and Hadden, 2025a).

also consistent when using random effects at the organization–country dyad level, which capture time-invariant elements that may motivate certain organizations to engage with particular countries. We also introduce a lagged dependent variable as an explanatory variable in all three types of models – linear probability models, rare events logit, and random effects – to capture how an INGO's decision to work in a country may be path dependent. Our findings for density and density squared are signed similarly in all three cases, although the density squared variable loses statistical significance in the linear probability model.

The results related to density and density squared are also robust to four other types of tests. First, we use time lags of 4–6 years (instead of 2 years) for the density variables. Second, we introduce the same additional controls described earlier – corruption, political stability, and democracy – as well as a measure of barriers to foreign-funded

NGOs that is available for the years in this earlier time period.[80] Third, we again substitute a measure of US imports for US alliances and total INGO density measures for American INGO density measures.[81] Fourth, we include year and organization indicator variables.

Beyond density, the results of the time-series analysis show that country need and country environment predict engagement. In the TSMOD analysis, contrary to what we found in Figure 5.4, richer countries are more likely to host American INGOs; the same is also true for larger countries, and (less anticipated) more repressive countries. We also find evidence that INGOs value consistency over time from our analysis of models including a lagged dependent variable: INGOs often continue to work in the same places. Moreover, there is a significant time trend: INGOs are less likely to work in a given country over time. This relationship may be because the greater INGO density in many countries over time is associated with overall decreases in international membership.

Finally, we do not find clear evidence that American INGOs are chasing foreign aid (beyond how resources might be related to INGO density) or basing their decisions on media coverage or US alliance patterns in Figure 5.5. Once we include density in our full models, US foreign aid and media coverage are not significantly correlated with INGO membership in a country. This finding is again striking in light of previous research that suggests such factors might be important drivers of human rights INGOs' behaviors. The lack of a clear relationship between US foreign economic assistance and American INGOs' geographic choices in Figure 5.5 stands in contrast to the positive relationship in Figure 5.4. One possible explanation for the different results is the different American INGO samples used in the two analyses for the outcome measures. Our original dataset on 868 American INGOs plausibly includes a higher proportion of organizations engaged in monitoring, enforcement, and service provision vs. the 174 "social change" INGOs that are the focus of the TSMOD; the American INGOs included in our original dataset therefore may rely more heavily on government funding than those in the TSMOD.

80 The source for the barriers to foreign-funding measure comes from Chaudhry (2022).

81 For this analysis, the imports measure comes from the Correlates of War Project Trade Data. See Barbieri, Keshk, and Pollins (2009); Barbieri and Keshk (2014).

5.6 Geographic Choices and Conservation INGOs

To further explore geographic choices and address some of the limitations of the preceding analysis, we conducted a case study of the population of American INGOs working on conservation, which offers a relatively difficult test of our theory. Density dependence is unlikely to drive geographic choices in this sector for at least three reasons. First, as described in Chapter 3, it is the smallest sector in our analysis. Since cooperation tends to be easier in smaller populations, we might expect mutual support to prevail among conservation INGOs, making geographic differentiation unnecessary.

Second, conservation INGOs draw on a much wider range of resources than those in some other sectors (such as civil society and democracy INGOs, which primarily depend on government funds). This broad resource base may dilute some of their competition.

Third, conservation is characterized by relatively consensual global prioritization processes, in which major players like the United Nations (UN) Environmental Programme, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and Conservation International identify a set of geographic locations that are most deserving of attention and then other actors follow suit.[82] Although these prioritization exercises always attract criticism,[83] Benjamin Halpern et al.'s analysis indicates substantial overlap across different prioritization models produced by various conservation organizations.[84] Thus, we might naturally expect American INGOs to concentrate in key hotspots like Brazil and Indonesia, when in fact (as we explain in what follows) they are much more geographically dispersed than prioritization models would predict. This case study presents evidence of our hypothesized mechanism: That density in the conservation sector is causing INGOs to identify geographic niches. It draws on published memoirs and histories of major environmental organizations, including WWF and Conservation International, as well as the secondary literature on conservation INGOs, newspaper articles, and other popular accounts. It also relies on interviews with thirteen representatives of environmental INGOs.[85]

[82] Conservation International, "Biodiversity Hotspots." Available at www.conservation.org/priorities/biodiversity-hotspots (last accessed July 21, 2022).
[83] Kareiva and Marvier (2003); O'Connor, Marvier, and Kareiva (2003).
[84] Halpern et al. (2006, 60).
[85] The Appendix details our interview methods.

5.6.1 A Brief History of Conservation

International conservation involves the protection of endangered species and habitats globally. Conservation INGOs engage in advocacy, monitor species and ecosystems, and provide a range of services, including protecting areas and parks, treating and rehabilitating species, researching habitat threats and diseases, educating citizens, supporting community development, and enforcing laws related to nature preserves.

Systematic conservation efforts first began as domestic activities in the late nineteenth century.[86] The creation of organizations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the United Kingdom (1889) and the Sierra Club in the United States (1892) launched an initial wave of NGOs focused on domestic conservation and wildlife management.[87] Nature conservation became more internationally oriented after World War II with the creation of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The IUCN was founded in 1948 at the urging of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to facilitate cooperation between national governments and disseminate research about conservation. One of its most important products was the "Red List of Endangered Species" that helped set global priorities for conservation work.[88]

The increased ecological consciousness of the 1960s led to the founding of WWF (originally named the World Wildlife Fund) to capitalize on public interest and raise funds for IUCN projects. WWF quickly opened chapters in different countries, including the United States (WWF-US), to channel money to the international office. Its initial impulse was cooperative, as founder Max Nicholson described in 1961: "What is needed is not a new organization to duplicate and compete with the work of existing bodies but a new co-operative international project to make their efforts effective by providing them with adequate resources."[89]

As briefly discussed in Chapter 3, although the US conservation landscape had many important players by 1961, WWF-US was one

[86] Brulle (2000).
[87] Carmichael, Jenkins, and Brulle (2012, 431).
[88] Boardman (1981).
[89] Quoted in Schwarzenbach (2011, 19).

of the first groups with an explicitly international focus. Most NGO action was organized through WWF or species protection programs based in US zoos. WWF-US believed it was operating in "an expanding market" in the 1970s and thus was keen to take on projects with other groups, reflecting its cooperative ethos.[90] In its first ten years, WWF International supported 550 conservation projects in 59 countries, including an anti-poaching unit in Kenya and an education campaign in India.

Although WWF-US held a virtual monopoly on international conservation for many years, other significant organizations entered the market in the 1980s. The intra-population dynamics were initially cooperative and supported collaboration on projects within the same countries. The Nature Conservancy – the largest and richest conservation NGO in the United States – launched its international program in 1980 with support from a $500,000 WWF-US grant. Conservation International was founded as a spin-off of the Nature Conservancy in 1987 and quickly became a major player by promoting the concept of "biodiversity hotspots" and specializing in the tools of "Rapid Assessment Programs."[91] Other INGOs welcomed these developments, and cooperation among these three organizations yielded major successes in the 1980s and early 1990s such as the protection of Corcovado National Park in Costa Rica.[92]

There was a steady increase in resources for conservation until 2008 (see Chapter 3), paralleled by a boost in attention to related issues. But the conservation INGO sector had become much more competitive by the 2000s.[93] For instance, WWF-US began to gradually move away from funding other organizations. As former WWF-US President Russell Train recalled in his memoir, the competitive dynamic was driven home when a foundation suggested the organization's funding for other groups and its lack of distinct programming made it hard to justify support.[94] There was also a prominent intra-INGO conflict in 2004, when the leader of a smaller INGO accused Conservation International, WWF, and the Nature Conservancy of undermining the

90 Schwarzenbach (2011, 73).
91 Seligmann (2011).
92 Boza (1993).
93 See Balboa (2016, 111) for a similar assessment.
94 Train (2003, 244).

land rights of indigenous peoples, leading to a greater interest in the intersection between conservation and human rights.[95]

5.6.2 Resources for Conservation

There are four main sources of funding for international conservation. The first is international aid, as in other sectors. Multilateral donors are especially important. Daniel C. Miller, Arun Agrawal, and J. Timmons Roberts found that spending by the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility comprised 59 percent of all conservation aid reported in the AidData database from 1980 to 2008.[96] Bilateral donors are also important contributors, including the United States (7 percent of total aid), the Netherlands (4 percent), and Germany (4 percent). Regional organizations including Inter-American Development Bank, European Communities, Asian Development Bank, and African Development round out the top ten donors. Second, American conservation INGOs receive a great deal of funding from private foundations such as the MacArthur Foundation, the Moore Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Third, corporate donors such as Coca-Cola and Disney fund many conservationists. The fourth funding source is (small and large) individual donors. For example, WWF-US received 31 percent of its budget from individuals in 2022.[97]

Despite the diverse funding sources, there is still considerable competition. Consistent with our arguments about density dependence, conservation INGO founders after 2000 reported that they attempted to respond to the sector's density and concentration by locating a distinct resource niche. As one founder explained in an interview with us:

> [W]e developed a business plan [in 2009], and a big part of it was to target a sector of resources and support that we thought was relatively untapped. But it didn't stay that way for long, because as soon as we got off the

95 Chapin (2004). See also Dowie (2009).

96 Miller, Agrawal, and Roberts (2013, 14).

97 WWF-US, "Annual Report," 2022. Available at https://files.worldwildlife.org/wwfcmsprod/files/FinancialReport/file/257wfcvxs7_AR2022_FINALPAGES_1_25_FPO.pdf?_ga=2.65143086.1605632995.1676493924-215408302.1676493924 (last accessed August 1, 2023).

ground other organizations figured out where the money was coming from and began to move in as well.[98]

When we asked what advice they would give others in the sector, another post-2000 INGO founder replied, "you better make sure you have your own source of funding, or that you're doing things better than everyone else. Because every nonprofit is competing with every other nonprofit, essentially."[99] As we argue in the next section, locating these distinct resource niches often involves strategic geographic choices.

Given the range of potential funding sources, we might expect a high degree of heterogeneity in donors' geographic preferences. But there does tend to be a "center" of the market; certain countries consistently receive more conservation aid than others. Between 1980 and 2008, ten countries received roughly 40 percent of all bilateral donor contributions of biodiversity aid – India, Brazil, China, Mexico, Indonesia, Colombia, Kenya, Philippines, Madagascar, and Tanzania.[100] Benjamin Halpern et al. examine a dataset of conservation spending in 2002 by international organizations and large INGOs (the World Bank, Global Environment Facility, Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, and IUCN), and find a similar geographic pattern in the Global South; they also note large amounts of spending in the United States.[101]

Yet there is a positive but weak correlation between biodiversity need and conservation spending at the country level.[102] Halpern et al. find that simply regressing the amount of land area identified in the INGO conservation priority models on conservation

98 Interview, Don Church, Co-Founder, Global Wildlife Conservation, by telephone, October 24, 2016.

99 Interview, Suzanne Braden, Founder, Pandas International, by telephone, October 5, 2016.

100 Miller, Agrawal, and Roberts (2013, 14).

101 Halpern et al. (2006, 59).

102 Miller, Agrawal, and Roberts also find that about 30 percent of the variation in foreign aid allocation can be explained by regression models that include the number of threatened species in a country, governance indicators, GDP per capita, population size, country area, and year (Miller, Agrawal, and Roberts, 2013, 18).

spending by major INGOs and IGOs can explain 37 percent of the variation in country-level spending.[103] This suggests that there is a significant amount of unexplained variation in how conservation work is targeted.

One possibility is that some of this mismatch may be because donors prefer to support conservation work in specific countries due to factors beyond need. But Halpern et al. further explain this divergence between need and spending by hypothesizing that INGOs have an organizational motive.[104] Their analysis identified "little overlap in the spending patterns of the five conservation organizations evaluated, suggesting that informal coordination or segregation of efforts may be occurring."[105] In an argument that is similar to ours, Halpern et al. indicate that this pattern suggests "many conservation organizations may be acting strategically in allocating conservation money to avoid spending where other organizations work."[106]

The dynamics of conservation efforts in sub-Saharan Africa also illustrate facets of niche finding.[107] For example, Dan Brockington and Katherine Scholfield conducted a census of conservation organizations working in sub-Saharan Africa from 2004 to 2006 and identified 281 organizations.[108] American groups constituted the largest share of INGOs in these data. Consistent with Halpern et al.'s global analysis,[109] they found that NGOs tended to avoid overlap in their project areas, with the exception of some very popular places that attracted many groups (e.g., Kruger in South Africa, Tsavo East in Kenya, and West Amboseli in Kenya).[110]

[103] Halpern et al. (2006, 61).
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid. (56).
[106] Ibid. (62).
[107] For more on conservation NGO decision-making in this region, see Ryan Pike, Sarah Bush, and Jennifer Hadden, "Protecting Giants: NGO Decision-making for Elephant Conservation," Yale Case 23-014, January 18, 2023. Available at https://shopcases.som.yale.edu/products/protecting-giants-ngo-decision-making-for-elephant-conservation (last accessed July 10, 2023).
[108] Brockington and Scholfield (2010).
[109] Halpern et al. (2006).
[110] Scholfield and Brockington (2009, 17).

5.6.3 Density and Geographic Choices

Our interviews and other qualitative materials provide organization-level evidence that conservation INGOs respond to a rise in density by trying to find less dense geographic niches. We observe that density seems particularly important to the decisions of smaller specialist groups and mid-sized generalist organizations. One example is the mid-sized generalist organization Re:wild (formerly Global Wildlife Conservation), an INGO based in Austin, Texas, with a budget of about $45 million that directly engaged in 33 countries in 2020 and provided support to another 56. Re:wild seeks to do at least 80 percent of its work in biodiversity hotspots, which still leaves "thousands and thousands of sites, and even if you try and focus on non-protected KBAs [Key Biodiversity Areas] within those, you're still looking at the low thousands."[111] As one staff member explained in an interview, a core part of the organization's strategy is to find distinct niches in terms of species and locations:

> One of our guiding principles as an organization is we want to work on things that other organizations are ignoring. So from the species perspective, we don't work on elephants and tigers. There are loads of organizations doing that. We work on freshwater fish and frogs because the big groups aren't focusing on them and they need help. And it's the same with sites.
>
> We don't want to go in and fight over Kruger [in South Africa]. There's enough people caring for Kruger. We want to go after these areas that might be Key Biodiversity Areas because of a rat. It's still really important. It might be an Alliance for Zero Extinction site for a spiny rat. We want to save that and so, we'll find partners locally that are keen to work in those areas. And lots of the places we work are not the big sexy areas, but from a preventing extinction point of view, they're critical.[112]

Re:wild currently has programming in KBAs in Vietnam, the Philippines, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, all of which are less dense countries for conservation INGOs.[113]

[111] Interview with Barney Long, Senior Director of Conservation Strategies, Re:wild, by Zoom, July 15, 2022.
[112] Ibid.
[113] See Re:wild, "Key Biodiversity Areas." Available at www.rewild.org/get-to-know/key-biodiversity-areas (last accessed September 8, 2023).

Another example is the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), a mid-sized organization with a budget of around $40 million. In 2020, WCN supported work in forty nine countries. As one staff member explained, the WCN has to evaluate its opportunities in countries carefully to determine if its engagement would add value; its strategy is both reactive and proactive:

> In some cases, if a donor comes to us and says, "I'm really interested in this species, and I can bring a lot of resources to it," this is an opportunity. We would then conduct due diligence to find out if in fact WCN can bring added value to an issue or a landscape or a group or something like that … in other cases, we look more strategically and say, "Okay, there is an abundance of resources going to, let's say, African conservation." And what we want to see more of are projects in areas that lack conservation coverage currently. So in places in Southeast Asia or Latin America, we might go looking intentionally to find opportunities, to bring some additional resources and help cultivate conservationists in those areas. That's when it becomes a dual track of being reactive to opportunities presented to us as well as being more intentional and strategic in the direction we go.[114]

In this way, WCN looks for "gaps" where the need is high but the conservation sector is not paying sufficient attention. Similar to Re:wild, much of WCN's strategy hinges on having effective partners available to implement the work. As our interviewee explained, "If we identify a conservation need in a specific place … we have to consider, is there an effective partner on the ground or not? Because if there's not, we are more limited in what we can do."[115] Thus, a high density of existing INGOs working in the area could further constrain the organization's ability to work in countries if it exhausted the supply of potential partners. But, consistent with our theory, a very low level of density might also be problematic since it may contribute to – or indicate – a lack of available partners.

Similar to organizations in most INGO populations, conservation INGOs often receive restricted funds tied to particular geographic areas. A review of a range of independent auditor statements from

[114] Interview, Paul Thomson, Senior Director of Conservation Programs, Wildlife Conservation Network, by Zoom, May 25, 2022.
[115] Ibid.

conservation organizations in our population reveals that the majority of INGO funds are donor restricted for a specific purpose, which could include geographic restrictions. This may be particularly true for some of the larger groups in our population. But larger organizations also typically operate with budgets that include some unrestricted funds. As one staff member explained to us, many organizations allow staff members to solicit funds for campaigns they consider high priority.[116] This solicitation process may give INGOs more autonomy over their campaigns and programmatic foci than the figures on unrestricted funds suggest.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that INGOs' organizational incentives regarding density shape their geographic choices. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, we show that organizations often seek to find geographic niches for their work due to competition. For this reason, INGOs are crowded out of some highly dense national environments as they seek distinct locations for their work. Contrary to some prior findings, we do not consistently observe that INGOs "chase aid" or media attention. But we do find evidence that organizational-level motivations related to competitiveness and survival are an important driver of geographic choices.

Geographic niche finding relies on longer time horizons: Organizations must have time to observe the environment and craft their best strategy in response to present levels of density. As a result, this geographic niche-finding dynamic may be less prevalent in the crisis-driven relief sector than in other areas of activity, suggesting future research opportunities for cross-sectoral comparisons. We expand on this topic in Chapter 6.

INGOs' need for differentiation is likely increasing geographic dispersion over time. We suggest that this dispersion has nuanced implications for global governance. On the one hand, the global spread of INGOs may equalize access to technical expertise and make aid delivery more efficient and equitable. On the other hand, organizational need for differentiation may be less appropriate in sectors where

[116] Interview with conservation INGO senior staff member, by Zoom, June 13, 2022.

demand is concentrated in some locations, leading to inefficiencies. For example, in the conservation sector, it may arguably be ecologically desirable for a large number of INGOs to concentrate in highly vulnerable biodiversity hotspots, yet organizational incentives pressure them to differentiate by spreading into other geographies and ecosystems. For example, geographic diversification is helpful if it leads to more organizations working in lesser known biodiversity hotspots, but perhaps less beneficial if it motivates organizations to focus their efforts in "cold spots" for the sole purpose of diversification.[117] In Chapter 6, we will reflect further on how funders may play a role in promoting helpful geographic dispersion while making sure areas of acute need remain well served.

117 But see Kareiva and Marvier (2003).

6 *The Future of INGOs*

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, created a complex humanitarian emergency on a scale not seen in Europe since World War II. More than 7 million people fled Ukraine, and over 8 million were displaced inside the country.[1] These people urgently needed food, water, housing, and medical treatment, among other things. As the aid flowed in, so too did international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). Beyond providing lifesaving relief, INGOs helped monitor and shame Russia for its war crimes and violations of international law. Yet INGOs faced harsh criticism for not doing enough to solve the crisis in and around Ukraine. Large INGOs found it difficult to spend money quickly and funnel it toward the local actors that were closest to the needy given the rigorous accounting standards they are held to in their home countries. Many domestic-led humanitarian efforts were insufficiently institutionalized to receive this outside funding. Even the hundreds of new formal Ukrainian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were often ill-equipped to receive money from abroad.[2] INGOs' influx into Ukraine raised a host of other concerns, such as distracting focus from other urgent humanitarian issues[3]

1 Humanitarian Outcomes, "Enabling the Local Response: Emerging Humanitarian Priorities in Ukraine, March–May 2022," June 2022, page 3. Available at www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ukraine_review_2022.pdf (last accessed December 21, 2022).

2 Jessica Alexander, "Is Ukraine the Next Tipping Point for Humanitarian Aid Reform?" *The New Humanitarian*, July 25, 2022. Available at www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/07/25/Ukraine-aid-reform-local-donors-neutrality (last accessed December 21, 2022).

3 Corinne Redfern, "How the focus on Ukraine is hurting other humanitarian responses," *The New Humanitarian*, July 7, 2022. Available at www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2022/07/07/Ukraine-aid-Russia-invasion-funding-donors (last accessed December 21, 2022).

and creating such a high demand for local housing that internally displaced Ukrainians struggled to pay their rent.[4] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky criticized INGOs for not doing enough of the right things: "We don't see them struggling to get access to camps where Ukrainians are prisoners of war and where political prisoners are held ... Nor do they help us to find Ukrainians who have been deported."[5]

The discourse surrounding INGOs in Ukraine is familiar to anyone who followed the debates surrounding humanitarian aid after the 2004 Asian Tsunami, 2010 Haiti earthquake, or 2011 Syrian civil war.[6] For all the good that these groups have done, they have also been accused of not doing enough, or attempting to do too much, or simply doing the wrong things. The attention to – and criticism of – INGOs is unsurprising given their substantial influence in contemporary global affairs. In the context of a world in which INGOs play such a large and fraught role, this book explores why they make the choices they do. In this chapter, we first review the theory we developed and its contributions. Next, we recap our empirical findings. We then consider how our theoretical framework might be extended to understand dynamics among INGOs headquartered in countries outside the United States and cross-sectoral variation. We also consider growth in other populations of global governance actors – especially for-profit development firms, direct-giving campaigns, and domestic NGOs – and how these actors may be challenging INGOs' dominance. Finally, we consider the study's implications for public and private funders working with INGOs to affect social change.

4 Humanitarian Outcomes, "Enabling the Local Response: Emerging Humanitarian Priorities in Ukraine, March–May 2022," June 2022, page 10. Available at www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ukraine_review_2022.pdf (last accessed December 21, 2022).

5 Quoted in SWI, "Red Cross Says It Is Doing All It Can in Ukraine," November 30, 2022. Available at www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/red-cross-says-it-is-doing-all-it-can-in-ukraine/48097332 (last accessed December 22, 2022).

6 The New Humanitarian Review, "Is Ukraine the Next Tipping Point for Humanitarian Aid Reform?" July 25, 2022. Available at www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/07/25/Ukraine-aid-reform-local-donors-neutrality (last accessed December 21, 2022). See also BouChabke and Haddad (2021).

6.1 Theory in Brief

Chapter 2 developed a theory about INGOs that explains variation in three important but understudied outcomes – founding, mission scope, and geographic location. Our approach differs from most prior studies on INGOs in that it seeks to explain the choices of INGOs *in general*, without focusing on groups working on a particular issue area (such as the environment or human rights) or those that have a certain tactical orientation (such as advocacy, monitoring, enforcement, or service provision).[7] We also consider organizations of varying sizes and levels of authority. This study therefore departs from the international relations (IR) literature's tendency to focus on leading organizations that are unusually active and influential.[8] Although such a focus can generate great insights, it also has limits; as Julia C. Gray notes, an overemphasis on "successful" organizations in global governance can cause researchers to draw incorrect conclusions about the full population.[9] Our theory starts with the assumption that INGOs are strategic actors that seek to maximize their odds of survival. Drawing on theories of organizational ecology, we posit that population density is a key environmental factor that shapes patterns of cooperation and competition among INGOs and thus their decisions about founding, mission scope, and geographic location. Some density in a population can promote mutual support among organizations. But higher levels of density introduce fierce battles over funding, attention, and other resources that are essential for survival.

This basic insight, we argue, helps us understand INGO leaders' and entrepreneurs' decisions about whether to enter the market, how much to specialize, and where they should work. These choices have important real-world consequences, since INGOs cannot affect state policies, diffuse international norms, or gain authority, for instance, if they do not exist, work on a particular issue, or operate in a certain country. Increases in density initially support foundings of new organizations and operations in new geographic locations, but eventually they deter them. Greater density also encourages organizations to focus

[7] Ours is not the only study to take this more general approach. See, for example, Mitchell, Schmitz, and van Vijfeijken (2020).
[8] Stroup and Wong (2017).
[9] Gray (2020, 34).

their missions more narrowly in an attempt to identify an approach or location that other organizations have not already claimed. Population density ultimately shapes organizations' likelihood of survival; high levels of density make them more likely to fail.

Of course, our theory cannot explain everything. While organizational ecology identifies the expected form of the relationship between density and foundings, mission specialization, and geographic locations, it cannot predict the inflection point at which a given population becomes "too dense" and competition prevails. Moreover, organizational ecology is sometimes criticized for presenting an overly structural perspective. We do not expect agents to be fully constrained by population dynamics; our case studies clearly illustrate they are not. But we do expect density to have predictable effects on INGOs, and the evidence largely supports our expectations.

Our approach challenges some conventional wisdom about INGOs. Population density is usually thought to drive competition; thus increases in density might be expected to uniformly deter foundings or nongovernmental efforts in a given location.[10] Instead, we argue that at low levels of density, increases in density can sometimes attract more organizations to the cause or a location. Contrary to other expectations in the literature, our perspective likewise suggests that *demand* for INGOs – measured, for instance, as media or policy attention to an issue or the extent of available resources – does not necessarily encourage INGO activity. Instead, INGOs are often more responsive to the overall conditions of their population, such as how dense or concentrated it is. Our theory also helps make sense of previous disagreements in the IR literature about the extent of competition and cooperation among INGOs. Whereas some studies emphasize how principled activists work together to effect change, others highlight how ferociously these groups fight over issue turf, media attention, and funding. Our insight is that each of these tendencies – toward competition or cooperation – may dominate at particular points in an INGO population's life cycle. When density is low, there is a greater tendency for INGOs to support each other and more scope for organizations to work successfully on a broad mission. Initial population growth can even encourage more foundings. But when density is high, these

[10] Cooley and Ron (2002).

behaviors are less likely, since INGOs find it more difficult to secure resources and there is more competition between them. Some organizations are crowded out of certain segments of the market or key geographic locations, while others are not founded in the first place.

6.2 Summary of the Findings

Chapters 3–5 test the observable implications of our theory and find strong support for it across multiple outcomes. In Chapter 3, we identify a curvilinear relationship between population density and foundings of American INGOs; as expected, increases in density are initially associated with more foundings but eventually lead to fewer foundings. Qualitative evidence from INGOs engaged in fostering of international civil society and democracy supports our interpretation that initially new organizations behave cooperatively with each other and encourage foundings, but organizations later discourage new entries and compete more for resources.

Chapter 4 explores the relationship between density and INGO mission specialism. In denser populations, we find that organizations are more likely to adopt specialist mission statements. When a population is highly concentrated, INGOs are also more likely to be specialized. Qualitative evidence drawn from the population of humanitarian INGOs supports our assertion that in a dense organizational population, there are limited opportunities for new generalist INGOs since the resource environment is so competitive. However, the environment can still support specialist organizations that pursue programmatic and geographic niches.

In Chapter 5, we examine where American INGOs choose to work. Similar to Chapter 3, we identify a curvilinear relationship between population density and our outcome of interest: Increases in density at first attract more American INGOs to work in a country, but further increases in density discourage them from setting up operations. We conduct a case study of international conservation and find that many American INGOs believe opening offices and conducting activities in a country that either has no (or very few) INGOs or is very saturated with them will be unsustainable.

We believe our multi-method approach offers significant advantages in investigating our research topic. On the one hand, the quantitative data on INGOs' behaviors drawn from tax records and an INGO roster helps identify broad trends across a wide variety of organizations. Although the analysis is necessarily limited in temporal and geographic scope (as it focuses on American INGOs after the end of the Cold War), it nevertheless generates significant insights given the comprehensiveness of the data within our study period and the importance of our country of focus for INGO politics. On the other hand, the qualitative data on INGOs' behaviors does a much better job of exploring our hypothesized causal mechanisms. Our case studies were designed to understand the processes that drive INGO decision-making, which the correlational evidence from the quantitative analysis cannot do as effectively. The socially generated focus group data complements our interviews and survey evidence, which are drawn from the same population but collected at the individual level.

6.3 The Future of INGOs

From certain vantage points, the future of INGOs looks bleak. Michael Edwards, who formerly held senior positions at Oxfam and Save the Children, is a prominent critic of INGOs. In 2016, he provocatively asked, "Too small to influence economics, too bureaucratic to be social movements, banned from politics, and removed from the societies they're trying to change, where do NGOs go next?"[11] Given the present (perceived) challenges, the same people who would have once founded or gone to work for an INGO to address an unmet social need may now be turning to other forms of action in private industry, digital advocacy, or elsewhere. Or they may no longer be taking action at all.

6.3.1 Views from the Trenches

Our survey of leaders at US-headquartered INGOs suggests Michael Edwards is not alone in his criticisms. Only 35 percent of our respondents reported that they thought their organization had been "very effective" at achieving its mission, and just 13 percent characterized the joint efforts of all organizations working in their issue area as

[11] Michael Edwards, "What's To Be Done with Oxfam?" *openDemocracy*, August 1, 2016. Available at www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/what-s-to-be-done-with-oxfam/ (last accessed July 13, 2022).

"very effective." While 30 percent of the practitioners surveyed view their own organization as "very innovative," only 4 percent think that about their sector as a whole. Although respondents had a more favorable view of their own INGOs than of INGO activity more generally, in both cases they were fairly pessimistic. Pessimism about American INGOs is rooted in practitioners' perceptions of density. When asked whether they would advise someone to start a new INGO in a hypothetical scenario that randomized variables of interest, having "a lot" of existing organizations instead of a "few" decreased the likelihood that they would recommend founding a new organization by 34 percent.[12] Density had by far the largest effect of any variable considered in our hypothetical scenario. For example, "a lot" of funding instead of "a little" increased support for founding by around 25 percent, while "a lot" of media attention increased it by around 11 percent. We also asked individuals to rank the most important considerations in decisions about whether to found a new INGO. The list of possible considerations included the number of organizations already working in the issue area, the quantity of media attention in the issue area, the extent to which the sector is economically concentrated, the degree of competition among organizations in the issue area, the amount of funding available in the issue area, and the volatility of the US political environment. Nearly half (42 percent) of respondents ranked density as the most important factor, compared to 27 percent for funding and 17 percent for media attention, the next most important factors.

INGO staffers also think environmental factors strongly influence international nonprofits' performance. In the same scenario described earlier, we asked respondents how effective they thought a hypothetical new INGO would be under different, randomly assigned conditions. They expected a new organization to be 33 percent less likely to be effective if "a lot" of organizations were already working on an

[12] This scenario was part of a forced-choice conjoint experiment. Although conjoint experiments typically involve hypothetical scenarios, they have been shown to generate choices that are quite close to real-life decisions. We report the average marginal component effects in the main text, which estimate the impact of a given attribute in the scenario (e.g., density) while averaging over the distribution of the other attributes (e.g., funding or media attention). See Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto (2014) and Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto (2015).

issue compared to a scenario with only a "few" organizations. Having "some" organizations was perceived as decreasing effectiveness by about 12 percent. Respondents generally believed the same factors support founding and organizational effectiveness. Such a similarity is to be expected insofar as INGO entrepreneurs are motivated – for both normative and instrumental reasons – to create new organizations in circumstances where such organizations are most likely to attract funding and supporters.

This evidence sheds light on why criticisms of INGOs seem to be growing. INGO populations have become significantly denser over time, and American INGO leaders tend to perceive dense organizational populations as significantly less effective, all else equal. As such, we can infer that INGO staffers are more likely to *worry* about organizational effectiveness today than they might have in the past. Whether INGO populations are in fact *becoming* less effective is unclear. However, since density is generally increasing over time, INGO leaders and potential future entrepreneurs seem to be more skeptical of their fields' potential to effectively solve contemporary problems, whether through advocacy, service delivery, monitoring, enforcement, or all of these. These dynamics may help explain why individuals like Michael Edwards are increasingly vocal about INGOs' flaws, as well as the changes in INGO behavior we documented in Chapters 3–5.

6.3.2 *Density and Other Global Governance Actors*

Density and saturation in the American INGO sector may also contribute to the emergence and growth of new types of organizational populations. Building on insights from organizational ecology, Kenneth W. Abbott, Jessica F. Green, and Robert O. Keohane argue that stagnation in one organizational population in IR can provide an opportunity for another population to emerge.[13] They maintain that while a crowded environment currently constrains growth in inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), private transnational regulatory organizations like the Verified Carbon Standard – which certifies carbon emissions reductions – are expanding their role in global governance. Such private regulatory organizations are more flexible than

[13] Abbott, Green, and Keohane (2016).

IGOs and have lower entry costs, which enables them to occupy favorable niches and attract different resources.

Given the recent stagnation in INGO foundings in the United States and many other countries, it is reasonable to wonder if new organizational forms will emerge in the coming decades to challenge INGOs' dominance as the main nonstate advocates, enforcers, monitors, and service providers in world politics. In fact, whereas 44 percent of the American INGO leaders in our survey indicated they would consider founding an NGO in the future, even more (51 percent) indicated they would consider founding another type of organization. More than three-quarters of the respondents thought other types of organizations can perform at least as well as NGOs. In this section, we describe three organizational populations that may challenge the dominance of American INGOs – for-profit development firms, direct-giving campaigns, and domestic NGOs outside the United States.

For-profit Development Firms

For-profit development firms are major players in foreign aid delivery in the United States. In 2020, 19 percent of US bilateral overseas aid was channeled through them vs. 22 percent through domestic and international NGOs;[14] the remainder was channeled directly to states and via IGOs. Firms and INGOs thus provide roughly equivalent services to the US government in terms of foreign aid delivery, and the former may increasingly be outcompeting the latter.

For example, the for-profit American firm Chemonics was founded in 1975 as a subsidiary of an international agribusiness enterprise. It is active on issues that overlap with American INGOs, ranging from development to global health to humanitarianism. It began receiving huge contracts starting in the 2000s for reconstruction work in Afghanistan, providing relief after the Haiti earthquake, and supply chain programs to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS.[15] Although its work has been subject to significant criticism,[16] Chemonics was the US

[14] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "United States," in Development Cooperation Profiles 2020. Available at https://doi.org/10.1787/45472e20-en (last accessed June 6, 2023).

[15] Chemonics, "Our Projects." Available at https://chemonics.com/projects/ (last accessed June 6, 2023).

[16] In Afghanistan, see Office of the Inspector General, "Audit of USAID/Afghanistan's Human Resources and Logistical Support Program,"

Agency for International Development's (USAID's) largest contractor in 2020.[17]

The for-profit development industry has flourished over the past twenty years in response to the US government's increased reliance on aid contracting.[18] Contracts are relatively attractive to for-profit organizations because, unlike grants or cooperative agreements (which are the alternative mechanisms preferred by many INGOs), they allow "profit" in the form of fixed fees in addition to overhead. Yet contracts involve more government control and thus less discretion on the part of the recipient organization, which is unappealing to many INGOs that want flexibility and autonomy in pursuing their social change goals. Firms arguably also have advantages over nonprofit organizations when competing for contracts. Because firms typically *only* take contracts on which they can charge a fixed fee and overhead,[19] they usually have more resources available for project administration and "proposal capture." Nonprofits that engage in both contract and grant work often have fewer resources available for these purposes, making it harder – but clearly not impossible – for them to win these large awards.

Two notes of caution are warranted here. First, the extent to which for-profit firms constitute challengers to INGOs in service provision varies according to how much the sector relies on government funding. The health sector depends heavily on such funding, and is considered the most easily "contractable" sector of INGO activity.[20] The environmental conservation sector (which, as discussed in Chapter 5, is less dependent on government funding than many other American INGO populations) has had much more limited firm involvement. Second, nonprofits cooperate *and* compete with firms, and quite often serve as

March 31, 2010. Available at /https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/5-306-10-007-p.pdf (last accessed June 6, 2023). In Haiti, see Jake Johnston and Alexander Main, "Breaking Open the Black Box: Increasing Aid Transparency and Accountability in Haiti," Center for Economic and Policy Research, April 2013. Available at www.cepr.net/documents/publications/haiti-aid-accountability-2013-04.pdf (last accessed June 6, 2023).

17 Devex, "Top USAID Contractors in 2020," June 4, 2021. Available at www.devex.com/news/top-usaid-contractors-in-2020-who-received-covid-19-funding-99088 (last accessed June 6, 2023).

18 Berrios (2000); Roberts (2014).

19 Brundt and Casey (2022).

20 Roberts (2014, 1036).

sub-awardees.[21] Although serving as "subs" has allowed some INGOs to continue to expand in the contracting era, their subsidiary role could constrain their ability to autonomously pursue their missions.

If for-profit development organizations continue to take over the delivery of US foreign assistance from American INGOs, this is likely to have at least two implications for global governance. First, firms tend to concentrate on measurable outputs and service delivery outcomes for which they can obtain contracts, such as the number of vaccines given, textbooks delivered, or recipients served. Of course, INGOs may also focus on these types of goals. Yet, unlike INGOs, firms rarely (if ever) have bigger-picture system-change goals or engage in policy advocacy alongside their service delivery roles. Thus, if firms increasingly replace INGOs, there will be growth in a narrow band of service delivery. While some may see this shift as a positive trend, it jeopardizes the broader political motivation that sparked the development of the INGO sector.

Second, numerous for-profit firms have been investigated for financial impropriety and excessive compensation.[22] Perhaps the most notable was the Academy of Education Development (later, simply AED), which had "65 contracts and grant agreements with USAID worth $640 million" when USAID suspended it in 2010[23] based on "evidence of serious corporate misconduct, mismanagement, and lack of internal controls" in its Pakistan and Afghanistan programs.[24] The organization has since been disbanded. Because firms are not subject to the nondistribution constraint (i.e., they can distribute profits to their employees and other stakeholders), they may be more prone to financial impropriety than nonprofits. Firms may need to be monitored more carefully than nonprofit organizations, which would divert more resources away from programming.

21 Brundt and Casey (2022).

22 Roberts (2014, 1038).

23 Ken Delianian, "U.S. Bans Contractor from Further Aid Programs," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 2010. Available at www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-dec-08-la-fg-pakistan-fraud-charges-20101209-story.html (last accessed July 6, 2023).

24 USAID Press Office, "USAID Suspends Academy for Educational Development from Receiving New U.S. Government Awards," December 8, 2010. Available at https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/usaid-suspends-academy-educational-development-receiving-new-us (last accessed June 6, 2023).

Other for-profit organizations also perform functions that overlap with those of American INGOs. For instance, certified B Corporations (or "B-Corps") seek to combine public benefit with business activity and have grown dramatically since the concept took hold in 2006.[25] Public–private partnerships and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives are also increasingly prominent, especially in some issue areas such as climate change.[26] But these new businesses and initiatives may not represent a true challenge to INGOs in the way that for-profit development firms do when they compete for the same government funding. For instance, an in-house CSR program related to the environment does not replace corporate funding for INGOs working on the environment; in some cases, such initiatives can create a demand for INGOs to help with implementation.[27] Nevertheless, these programs could pose additional challenges to INGOs in the future.

Direct-giving Campaigns

Direct-giving campaigns – often Internet enabled through platforms such as Give Directly, GoFundMe, or Kiva – are also gaining popularity as an alternative to INGO-led programming. This shift is part of broader changes in transnational action generated by digital technologies.[28] These platforms can be used to help a Ukrainian family buy basic necessities, donate to support the high school education of a girl in Indonesia, or loan money to a carpenter in Uganda to purchase business supplies, to name just a few examples.

Direct-giving campaigns compete head to head with traditional nonprofits by touting their lower overhead and higher efficiency in supporting charitable activity abroad. For example, GiveDirectly provides data on its website to compare its fundraising efficiency with major INGOs such as Save the Children and Doctors Without Borders.[29]

These organizations take different approaches. GoFundMe is the largest and most flexible fundraising platform; it allows both

[25] See B Lab Global, "Growing the Movement." Available at www.bcorporation.net/en-us/movement/ (last accessed July 23, 2023).
[26] For example, Andonova (2010).
[27] Green (2013).
[28] Hall, Schmitz, and Dedmon (2020); Hall (2022).
[29] Give Directly, "How to Understand GiveDirectly's Financials," November 7, 2022. Available at www.givedirectly.org/financials/ (last accessed June 8, 2023).

individuals and nonprofits to create appeals and accept donations. GoFundMe does not vet these appeals, relying on peer-to-peer reputation evaluation, but it has raised $15 billion from over 200 million donations since its founding in 2010.[30] While these campaigns are often organized around international persons or causes, at the time of writing GoFundMe only allows withdrawals from individuals located in nineteen developed countries.[31] GiveDirectly specializes in digital cash transfers to people living in poverty and currently operates in twelve countries. Founded in 2009, it reports delivering over $650 million to more than 1.4 million people.[32] Recipients are identified using poverty data from national surveys, and the transfers are not earmarked for any specific purpose.[33] Kiva allows individuals to make micro-loans to other individuals seeking support for businesses or educational expenses. These loans are vetted by microfinance institutions in the individuals' home countries that serve as "lending partners."[34] Kiva reports having funded over $1.9 billion in loans since its founding in 2005, with a 96 percent repayment rate.[35]

Some nonprofits have embraced the rise of direct giving. INGOs can raise funds for their work on GoFundMe, and some organizations like the International Refugee Committee combine direct cash relief with other kinds of programming.[36] Yet it is not clear that direct giving is more effective than relying on INGOs. Conditional or unconditional cash transfers have been found to have positive effects on outcomes including poverty, school attendance, health and nutrition, as well as household savings and investment, and do not seem to detract from

[30] GoFundMe, "Determining if a Fundraiser is Trustworthy," March 1, 2023. Available at https://support.gofundme.com/hc/en-us/articles/115015913668-Determining-if-a-fundraiser-is-trustworthy (last accessed June 7, 2023).

[31] GoFundMe, "Countries Supported on GoFundMe," March 23, 2023. Available at https://support.gofundme.com/hc/en-us/articles/360001972748-Countries-supported-on-GoFundMe (last accessed June 7, 2023).

[32] GiveDirectly, "About." Available at www.givedirectly.org/about/ (last accessed June 7, 2023).

[33] GiveDirectly, "FAQ." Available at www.givedirectly.org/faq/ (last accessed June 7, 2023).

[34] Kiva, "How Kiva Works." Available at www.kiva.org/about/how (last accessed June 7, 2023).

[35] Kiva, "About Us." Available at www.kiva.org/about (last accessed June 7, 2023).

[36] International Rescue Committee, "Cash Relief." Available at www.rescue.org/topic/cash-relief (last accessed June 7, 2023).

work participation or increase fertility rates.[37] But the evidence is inconclusive regarding whether cash transfers are more cost effective than other types of poverty interventions, even though they reduce organizational overhead and administrative costs.[38] Thus, although a narrow comparison of overhead rates would favor direct giving over INGOs, it is unclear whether the rise of direct giving would truly improve aid efficiency overall.

Domestic NGOs Outside the United States

Domestic NGOs based outside the United States may also challenge the dominance of American INGOs. Domestic NGOs (i.e., those without international operations) already perform similar functions to INGOs in terms of advocacy, service provision, monitoring, and enforcement in many issue areas. As David Carroll, director of the Democracy Promotion at the Carter Center, put it with respect to election monitoring, "In the democracy promotion community we are increasingly aware that the future is domestic observation – it has to be, and everybody knows that."[39] Although INGOs like the Carter Center have advantages (e.g., possibly greater authority with international audiences and better fundraising potential in their headquarter countries), they also have limitations (e.g., possibly weaker authority with domestic audiences who may fear foreign interference or more limited local knowledge).[40]

Some leading American INGOs and their funders are trying to hasten the transfer of resources from INGOs to domestic NGOs. For example, in 2022, USAID Administrator Samantha Power announced that the agency would seek to direct 25 percent of its aid to local organizations, up from an estimated 6 percent.[41] Some analysts have expressed skepticism about USAID's localization initiative, noting

[37] Bastagli et al. (2018).
[38] Brian Lucas, "Financing and Cost-effectiveness of Cash Transfer Schemes," August 2010. Available at https://gsdrc.org/publications/financing-and-cost-effectiveness-of-cash-transfer-schemes/ (last accessed June 7, 2023. See also Evans and Popova (2016).
[39] Bjornlund et al. (2014, 274).
[40] Bush and Prather (2018).
[41] USAID, "Local Capacity Strengthening Policy," October 17, 2022. Available at www.usaid.gov/policy/local-capacity-strengthening (last accessed June 7, 2023).

that this shift has been attempted before and that localization is a "buzzword" that may not imply concrete changes.[42] Some see echoes of the disappointing 2016 "Grand Bargain" negotiated between states, IGOs, INGOs, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies to enhance local input into how humanitarian aid is delivered. A group of INGOs including ActionAid, CARE, Oxfam, and Save the Children has been quite critical of the implementation of this initiative, writing, "there is nothing grand about the progress that's been made."[43]

American INGOs – and Global North INGOs more broadly – carefully navigate this space by supporting and empowering their overseas partners without imperiling their own survival. The goal behind localization initiatives is to ensure that local actors have ownership of advocacy, service provision, monitoring, and enforcement in their own countries and can be equitably engaged in externally funded programming. To achieve this goal, funders must address several impediments to locally led development. For instance, structural and social barriers limit local NGOs' access to international aid for service provision; overcoming them will require both increasing the capacity of local organizations and shifting how aid is administered. Although domestic NGOs may instead focus on domestic fundraising, the pool of resources from which they can draw is often much smaller than the pool of international funding. Capacity constraints also significantly limit local NGOs' abilities as monitors and enforcers. These groups must also confront constraints on their ability to generate and publish politically usable information in environments that are not democratic.[44]

If successful despite such challenges, localization would influence the nature of global governance in at least three ways. First, by empowering non-US organizations, it would require Americans to relinquish

[42] Amruta Byatnal, "Samantha Power Takes Localization Global," *Devex*, December 14, 2022. Available at www.devex.com/news/samantha-power-takes-localization-global-104646 (last accessed June 7, 2023). See also Khoury and Scott (2024) on the challenges of truly localizing.

[43] Oxfam International, Care International, Save the Children, et al., "Joint Agency position on the Future of the Grand Bargain," May 25, 2021. Available at https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-05/Updated_25%20May_Final%20Position%2C%20Joint%20Agency_Future%20of%20the%20GB.pdf (last accessed July 5, 2023).

[44] Swedlund (2013).

some control over international giving and programming. Second, at present, there is significant cross-national variation in the nature and depth of domestic NGOs that could serve as local partners or replacements.[45] An emphasis on localization might unwittingly channel resources (both material and nonmaterial) from the Global North toward places where local organizations resemble American INGOs, leaving out some of the poorest and most vulnerable in the process. And third, if the localization agenda takes hold, it remains an open question whether the dynamics we identify in this book – decreased foundings, increased specialization, and organizations spreading out – might eventually apply within some national NGO populations that are currently less competitive.

The Strength of the Challenge

Alternative organizational forms seem to pose the greatest challenge to American INGOs in their role as service providers based on the preceding review; their roles as advocates, monitors, and enforcers are safer, at least for now. It may be that, despite the challenges INGOs face in dense population environments, their advantages in terms of legitimacy make them more difficult to displace when it comes to advocacy, monitoring, and enforcement. This is a hypothesis that can be tested in future research.

In the domains of advocacy, monitoring, and enforcement, the response to INGOs' (perceived) failings may be more likely to involve attempts to reform existing INGOs or create new types of INGOs, despite the density of the population. While Chapter 4 documented how mission specialization is a response to population density, other forms of niche seeking are also possible.[46] For example, around 80 percent of the annual budget of BRAC – a leading international development INGO – comes from social enterprises.[47] If INGOs can fundraise through social enterprises, they may be able to distinguish themselves from other groups that rely on more traditional forms

[45] For example, Salamon and Anheier (1998).
[46] Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2019).
[47] Kim Jonker, "In the Black with BRAC," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2009. Available at https://ssir.org/articles/entry/in_the_black_with_brac (last accessed July 3, 2023). On organizational ecology and social enterprises, see also Searing, Lecy, and Andersson (2016).

of finance. The growth of Internet-enabled campaign groups like Change.org, MoveOn, or Avaaz may mark the emergence of a new organizational model in which advocacy is less staff driven and more member driven, which could address some past failures of INGOs.[48]

6.4 Directions for Future Research

The theory we developed in this book sheds light on patterns of American INGO foundings, specialization, and geography. Since the datasets we used in this book are freely accessible, other researchers can use them as a starting point for additional inquiries.[49] Our book's theory has the potential to illuminate other topics about INGOs. We briefly sketch three promising directions to extend our study.

6.4.1 Looking Beyond American INGOs

We tested our general theory about INGOs primarily using evidence on *American* INGOs due to various research design considerations discussed in Chapter 1. As shown in Table 1.1, American INGOs represent 28 percent of the world's INGOs – far more than are headquartered in any other country. As such, studying American INGOs is a valid and important endeavor, and our focus on the post-Cold War period allows us to examine dynamics among numerous American INGO populations during a key period of population change. Figure 1.1 indicates that the drop-off in foundings of new American INGOs is very similar to the decline in foundings of new INGOs in many other countries at this time, including Western European countries that are home to relatively large numbers of INGOs. Thus, there is some prima facie evidence that the trends we have documented and sought to explain with regards to American INGOs might apply to other national populations of INGOs in recent decades.

Yet it remains an open question whether our findings extend to other national settings. Some other national charity regulators provide information on the founding and revenues of NGOs that can be used to replicate and extend our findings from Chapter 3.[50] For example, the

[48] Hall (2022).
[49] The replication files for this book are available at Bush and Hadden (2025b).
[50] Bloodgood, Stroup, and Wong (2023) review data availability in selected countries in the Global Register of Nonprofit Data Sources.

Charity Commission for England and Wales and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator release information about British NGOs that is similar to what the National Center for Charitable Statistics provides in the United States. These data have not been examined in much depth to our knowledge, even though the United Kingdom is home to the second-largest number of INGOs globally according to the Yearbook of International Organizations (see Table 1.1). However, one study used the government data to identify British international development NGOs, finding that the creation of new groups that spend at least £10,000 annually has slowed since 2009.[51] Other government registries – where they exist, are comprehensive, and are publicly accessible – could be profitably analyzed by researchers.

To build on our analysis in Chapters 4 and 5, researchers could similarly search for information online to identify the missions and geographic locations for other populations of INGOs listed in government registries. In Chapter 5, we also analyzed the American INGOs listed in the Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset (TSMOD), which is less-comprehensive than government registries but lists the headquarters and geographic locations for a large set of advocacy organizations globally and over time.[52] The TSMOD could be used by other researchers to study the geographic choices of non-American INGOs, such as those headquartered in the UK or France. It would also be feasible to replicate the analysis from Chapter 5 on a sectoral level for some large sectors without restricting by nationality, using finer grained measures of need and resources. For example, an analysis of global conservation INGOs' geographic decisions could consider measures of ecosystem degradation and the prevalence of endangered species along with variables capturing media attention, conservation aid, and INGO density.

Evaluating how the dynamics we study in this book might play out among INGOs headquartered in the Global South is of particular interest. Global South INGO populations are less dense than those in the Global North and may therefore be exhibiting some of the early life-cycle features that we associate with periods of low density in the United States (i.e., greater cooperation among INGOs, and thus

51 Banks and Brockington (2020, 711).
52 Smith and Wiest (2012); Smith, Plummer, and Hughes (2017); Smith et al. (2019).

more foundings and less specialization). Despite their smaller numbers, Global South INGOs are gaining more agency in global advocacy.[53] To identify how populations of Global South INGOs are changing, researchers might use national charity regulators' information, as well. Although countries in the Global South may be less likely to maintain this type of information due to more limited capacity, there are some relevant data sources. For example, Kenya maintains a public registry of NGOs operating there.[54] Although this registry lacks information on whether NGOs are domestic or international, as well as many other individual NGO characteristics, researchers may be able to gather such information themselves (e.g., by visiting NGOs' websites). We are aware of similar registries that exist for Bangladesh and Uganda, although they are similarly limited in their reporting of organizational characteristics such as sector and revenue.

We know of no reason ex ante why our theoretical framework for understanding INGO choices would not apply outside the Global North. But Global South settings present two challenges for INGOs that future research should explore. First, the domestic environment in most Global South countries is significantly less resource rich than it is in the Global North, which makes fundraising in INGOs' headquarter countries more difficult. Even BRAC, which is based in Bangladesh and raises funds from social enterprises, relies on funders from the Global North, including IGOs and development agencies like USAID.[55] As such, INGOs in the Global South may not rely as heavily on donors in their home countries as do Global North INGOs, making it potentially less appropriate to define their populations nationally.

In a second challenge, home governments for Global South INGOs are less likely to be democratic and may thus be less cooperative with nonprofits. Although the relationship between NGOs and authoritarianism is complex, Global South countries may be more likely than those in the Global North to perceive INGOs as a threat because such groups represent an organized form of civil society that often (but not always) seeks to advance liberal values.[56] In addition, countries in the

[53] Bloodgood and Pallas (2022).
[54] Brass (2016).
[55] See BRAC, "Annual Report 2021," page 27. Available at www.brac.net/downloads/ar2021/BRAC.pdf (last accessed July 3, 2023).
[56] Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2016); Heiss (2019); Ayoub and Stoeckl (2024b).

Global South are more likely to be aid recipients than aid donors; thus they are less likely to rely on INGOs to help implement their foreign policy initiatives. For these reasons, INGO population dynamics in the Global South are less likely to depend on state resources and are more likely to be influenced by state repression than is the case for American INGOs.

6.4.2 Considering Variation Across Issue Areas

The similarity of our findings across American INGO populations that have very different issue characteristics, sizes, and resource profiles promotes the generalizability of our conclusions. Yet to develop and test a general theory about INGO behavior, we set aside interesting questions about how sectors differ from one another. Future research could extend our approach by examining how (and why) our theory applies differently across various issue areas. We suggest three particularly promising avenues based on variation across issue areas that we identified in the research for this book.

First, Chapter 3 shows that in each of the four populations we studied in depth, density has an inverted u-shaped relationship with INGO foundings (see Figure 3.4). But the total density of each sector varies: Conservation is the smallest sector and humanitarianism is by far the largest. Future work might consider why some sectors of INGO activity become smaller or larger than others. Organizational ecology suggests that the answer may be due to differences in resources and the "carrying capacity" of the population.[57] Yet the conservation population has attracted more total resources than the much larger civil society and democracy population (see Figure 3.5) and has become more concentrated.[58] Why do INGO populations develop differently? The answer may lie in issue characteristics, such as the extent to which various types of INGOs benefit from economies of scale, or other historical factors related to population development.

Second, Chapter 4 identifies mission specialization as one way in which founders attempt to find a niche in crowded and concentrated environments. We measure mission specialization in terms of programmatic scope and geographic scope, and identify a similar proportion of

[57] Hannan and Freeman (1977).
[58] See also Hadden and Bush (2021).

specialists in each of the four issue areas we study (see Figure 4.1). Future scholars might explore why specialization occurs on certain additional dimensions.[59] For example, there is ample differentiation in faith-based vs. non-faith-based organizations among humanitarian INGOs, but less differentiation on this dimension among conservation and civil society and democracy INGOs even though both issues are plausibly relevant to religious communities. This type of variation might be examined by considering issue areas' resource profiles or how these issues are socially constructed and practiced.[60]

Third, Chapter 5 establishes how INGOs try to avoid crowded national environments by shifting their activities to countries that have less competition. Geographic niche finding has encouraged American INGOs to spread out across the globe over time (see Figure 1.2). Future researchers might consider how well this dynamic describes issues that are characterized by short- vs. longer-term time horizons. For example, in Chapter 5, we speculate that humanitarian INGOs are less able to engage in geographic niche finding than those in the global health and civil society and democracy populations because the former's problem structure requires them to respond to urgent crises, wherever they are located. Humanitarian organizations may have shorter-term time horizons than groups in other sectors, making it harder to adjust their strategy to changes in country-level density. This demand is not simply an "objective" feature of humanitarianism; rather, it reflects a core principle of the field. Further explorations of what type of time horizons prevail in different issue areas and how they affect INGO behavior will be fruitful.

6.4.3 Studying the Impact of INGOs

This book implicitly explores how the strategies INGOs pursue in competitive and dense environments influence global governance outcomes. Theoretically, high levels of density could have both positive and negative consequences for INGO effectiveness, defined either in terms of goal attainment or in terms of internal organizational

[59] On tactical differentiation among environmental INGOs, see Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2019).

[60] On the latter, see Barnett (2018).

processes.[61] As discussed previously, increased density and the ensuing competition can generate incentives that lead to organizations' dysfunction, creating a "resource scramble" in which sectors perform less effectively than they otherwise could or should.[62] Density can also have negative consequences *not* directly caused by competition. For example, Jennifer Hadden demonstrates how increased density in the climate change movement after 2008 made coordination tasks more difficult, causing INGOs to work at cross purposes during campaigns.[63]

But the competition introduced by increased density might also improve goal attainment and internal processes. Whereas some practitioners dislike competition, funders may appreciate that it helps weed out less effective strategies and organizations. For example, Cristina Balboa highlights how increased competition for funding causes organizations to streamline their staff and limit their overhead, which could enhance programming efficiency.[64] Yet she also discusses how these financial pressures make it harder for INGOs to incorporate ideas from their local partners, undermining their efforts to design contextually appropriate programs.

It is exceedingly difficult to measure INGO effectiveness at the population level. As scholars of IGOs know well, it is hard to agree on common performance indicators for global governance institutions, and even more challenging to causally identify the effect of IGOs on the agreed-upon indicators.[65] The same issues carry over to studying INGOs. And if it is challenging to identify the effects of individual actors in global governance, it is even more difficult to aggregate those effects to quantify population-level effectiveness.

Two main challenges are relevant to evaluating INGO populations' effectiveness. First, many important advocacy, service provision, monitoring, and enforcement outcomes that are essential for assessing INGOs' goal attainment are hard to measure and quantify. Foundational concepts like "women's empowerment," "democracy," or even

[61] Mitchell (2012, 325–326) reviews the debate on how to conceptualize effectiveness.
[62] Cooley and Ron (2002).
[63] Hadden (2015).
[64] Balboa (2014).
[65] Gutner and Thompson (2010).

"development" capture contested, nuanced, and contextually specific components that make developing cross-national measures difficult (and for some, even inappropriate).[66] Second, and compounding this measurement difficulty, is the fact that we would want to examine INGO performance across multiple populations that vary in their density and concentration. Developing comparable measures across issue areas as diverse as conservation, civil society and democracy, global health, and humanitarianism is a daunting task. Although several studies have examined how INGOs influence the outcomes of particular campaigns,[67] they do not necessarily indicate the work of an entire INGO population.

Given these challenges, and despite the benefits of examining variation across issue areas, our performance measures may need to be population or even campaign or program specific. Theoretically, we note that many analyses expect the number of INGOs to be linearly related to the likelihood of success.[68] Our analysis suggests a nonlinear relationship may be more likely.

Finally, it is an open question whether better coordination might temper some of the potentially negative consequences of higher density. INGOs often coordinate with one another through sector or theme-specific coalitions, such as InterAction (an alliance of humanitarian INGOs) or the Climate Action Network. Some American INGOs are embedded in international networks of INGOs of the same "brand," such as Oxfam or Friends of the Earth. Yet such coalition work is challenging and certainly not a guarantee of harmonious working relations even where it exists.[69]

Returning to the book's opening example of the Asian Tsunami, the case illustrates three reasons why better inter-INGO coordination might be challenging to achieve in crowded organizational environments. First, as detailed in Chapter 1, the rapid proliferation of groups post-Tsunami increased the diversity and sheer number of groups present on the ground. This density made coordination among different INGOs more difficult in terms of programmatic harmonization and more costly in terms of staff time. The United Nations responded

[66] Broome and Quirk (2015, 821).
[67] For example, Keck and Sikkink (1998); Price (1998).
[68] For example, Murdie and Hicks (2013).
[69] For example, Doherty and Doyle (2013); Hadden (2015).

by adding even more coordination meetings, which were increasingly inefficient and poorly attended.[70] While coordination is doubtlessly beneficial, it becomes more costly as the number of INGOs increases (as it has across American INGO sectors, as shown in Chapter 3), often leading organizations to perceive trade-offs between coordinating with other INGOs and implementing their own programs.

Second, inter-INGO coordination is a particular issue for small INGOs because it does not scale with organization size – organizations with smaller staffs are much more burdened. As a result, in Indonesia after the Asian Tsunami, only around 10–40 of the more than 250 INGOs present attended coordination meetings.[71] Most of the organizations engaged in coordination meetings were large, generalist groups, even though smaller, specialist groups represented around 35 percent of resources for project implementation. The Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, a large-scale learning effort across dozens of agencies, cited the limited involvement of such groups as a major barrier to inter-INGO coordination.[72] Thus, in a world where small, specialist organizations are proliferating (as shown in Chapter 4), coordination may become even harder.

Third, INGOs always have complicated incentives when it comes to cooperation. On the one hand, the dangers of poor coordination can be very real. As the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition wrote of that case, “humanitarian space can become saturated with contenders, and poor performance of just one agency can compromise the effectiveness of all the others.”[73] On the other hand, INGOs greatly value their autonomy and vary in the extent to which they are willing to adjust to other actors. As demonstrated by the Asian Tsunami case, INGOs can fiercely compete with one another, sometimes jealously guarding access to key resources and even beneficiaries. INGOs need to stake out niches in competitive environments (as shown in Chapters 4 and 5), which also made it difficult to establish consensus on joint advocacy positions in the Asian Tsunami.[74] In the world of growing INGO competition we document in this book, it is reasonable to think that

70 Bennett et al. (2006, 37).
71 Ibid. (37).
72 Ibid. (49).
73 Ibid. (23).
74 Ibid. (73).

"coordination" may often take the form of information sharing about already planned activities, more than a true harmonization of actions.

While the Asian Tsunami vividly illustrates the problems around INGO coordination, we suspect that these same dynamics likely apply beyond the humanitarian sector. Although implementing deeper forms of coordination is hard to envision in the crowded and competitive populations at present, future analyses might explore variation in coordination – and its implications for effectiveness – through studies of other issues and sectors.

6.5 Implications for Funders

Overall, the evidence presented in this book suggests that INGOs may be in a relatively weak position from which to overcome competitive pressures through their own coordination. Rather than banding together to respond to the changing geopolitical atmosphere, even INGOs with compatible social change goals in many cases still perceive each other as rivals in the current crowded market for funding, media attention, policy influence, staff, volunteers, partnerships, and more.

How should those in positions of power who interact with INGOs – including individual donors, private philanthropies, corporations, and government agencies – respond to the rise in density and competition within INGO populations? Funders and policymakers wishing to support advocacy, service provision, monitoring, and enforcement through INGOs in the twenty-first century should be prepared to alter their own policies and to provide more support to help these organizations overcome the attendant challenges of crowded organizational environments and the global political barriers that increasingly stand in their way.

Donors must be careful not to miss the forest for the trees in their interactions with INGOs. Our analysis shows that the population of American INGOs that can work on many important issues cannot be expected to grow much further, absent a large-scale shift in resources or political opportunity structure. Rather than focusing on head-to-head comparisons of INGOs based on narrow metrics, INGO funders should develop policies and performance metrics that encourage the coordination of efforts within highly dense and mature INGO populations. Coordination and cooperation can be encouraged through networking events and requirements that INGOs submit joint applications for grants, as well as resources for the small INGOs that may be especially burdened by coordination mandates. Adopting a "collective impact" approach, which refers to when "a group of important actors from different sectors [commit] to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem at scale," may be valuable.[75] Donors should likewise recognize that INGOs may avoid working in geographic locations with substantial unmet needs in favor of areas that they perceive as less crowded and competitive; donor-driven mandates to cooperate may help to alleviate this problem.

We also observe increasing specialization. This trend may make it more difficult for INGOs to achieve the large-scale successes that some funders would like to see. Although specialization often increases efficiency, it also introduces rigidity and a narrowness of purpose that is ill-suited to tackling broad-based issues like climate change. Thus, funders may need to provide seed funding to explicitly promote cooperation between specialists and generalists across sectors in order to build programming ideas that reflect the kind of solutions they seek.

Finally, since new INGOs are being founded at a lower rate in the United States and many other countries, certain new forms of innovation are likely missing from fields that are increasingly bureaucratized and professionalized. Those with the power and resources to shape INGOs going forward should encourage both the creation of new organizations with good ideas and risk taking by existing organizations to scale productive innovations.

6.6 Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, many once small INGO populations have evolved into crowded and economically powerful fields. Long-time practitioners have experienced rising population density and its consequences for their organizations' decisions. This book documents these trends from their perspectives as well as through analysis of tax records, INGO registries, and other data sources.

In this book, we argue that population density powerfully shapes INGO strategies. Rising density has changed how leaders and

[75] Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact (2018, 16).

entrepreneurs conceive of new groups, what purposes they might have, and where they decide to work. Investigating the impact of these changed environmental conditions is an important task for scholars who seek to understand why INGOs do what they do – and ultimately, how they perform.

There are many urgent global issues and many unmet needs. Ongoing crises related to conflict, climate change, democratic backsliding, natural disasters, and public health are likely to continue, if not accelerate. Despite challenges and challengers, INGOs are likely to remain central players in global governance. Thus, developing policies and approaches that recognize and respond to the competitive realities of INGO populations in the twenty-first century should be a central goal of funders and policymakers who seek to support their work in the years to come.

7 *Appendix*

This appendix covers research ethics and the methods used in our human subjects research, which included interviews, a survey, and focus groups. Our Online Appendix (referenced throughout the book) contains additional supplementary information, such as details on variable coding and robustness checks for our statistical analyses.[1]

7.1 Research Ethics

The ethical principles that guided our research have been informed by the American Political Science Association's (APSA) "Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research."[2] The sections that follow address many of the ethical issues that arise when conducting human subjects research, including consent; confidentiality; laws, regulations, and prospective review; and compensation. We address these issues for each type of human subjects research separately in the sections that follow.

Additionally, we mention here five cross-cutting ethical issues for our human subjects research. (1) Power: The individuals involved with our human subjects research (high-level staffers at American international nongovernmental organizations [INGOs]) are not generally vulnerable or low-power participants. Nevertheless, we made every effort to follow the APSA recommendation to "respect their autonomy, protect them from harm, and treat them fairly."[3] (2) Deception: Our study did not involve any deception. We described our research in an accurate way in our invitations to participate and consent scripts. (3) Harm and Trauma: We did not anticipate that participating in our research would cause harm or trauma to any human subjects. Our

[1] Bush and Hadden (2025a).
[2] Ad Hoc Committee on Human Subjects (2020).
[3] Ibid. (3).

research topic – INGO strategies – is something that the human subjects commonly discuss as part of their professional responsibilities. INGO performance can be a sensitive topic, but any risk of professional harm that could come from sharing a critical view of INGOs should have been minimized by our assurances of anonymity (for the survey) and confidentiality (for the focus groups and, when requested, the interviews). (4) Impact: Our research did not "compromise the integrity of political processes for research purposes."[4] (5) Shared Responsibility: We affirm that the "responsibility to promote ethical research goes beyond the individual researcher or research team." Research assistants (RAs) involved with this research completed human subjects research training when appropriate, and we worked with them to "identify and address ethical issues related to research."[5]

7.2 Interview Methods Appendix

We conducted semi-structured interviews with founders, leaders, and other senior staff at American INGOs. This interview data collection project was determined exempt by our university Institutional Review Boards (IRBs).[6] This section describes our methods in greater detail, following some of the recommendations of Erik Bleich and Robert Pekkanen.[7]

7.2.1 Interview Team and Timeline

We conducted fifty three interviews with individuals working in fifty two American INGOs between 2016 and 2023. The interviews proceeded in two phases. First, we began interviews in the civil society and democracy (Bush) and conservation (Hadden) populations in 2016, drawing on our background knowledge of these issue areas gained from previous experience interviewing staffers in these populations. Some interviews in these populations were added in later

[4] Ibid. (13).
[5] Ibid. (20).
[6] University of Maryland IRB protocol number 1244959-6; Yale University IRB protocol number 2000023665.
[7] Bleich and Pekkanen (2013).

years as opportunities arose to connect with individuals who had not responded to our earlier requests for interviews.

In the second phase, graduate RAs joined the project to assist with interviews. We trained Connor Kopchick (from the University of Maryland) to conduct interviews with American global health INGOs in 2020. Bush and Hadden also conducted or co-conducted some interviews within this population. In 2021, graduate RA Melissa Pavlik (from Yale University) completed a similar training with us and conducted interviews with American humanitarian INGOs. Hadden co-conducted a few interviews within this population.

7.2.2 Sampling Procedures and Response Rate

Since we sought insights into organizational decision-making and history during the interviews, we targeted senior-level INGO personnel – particularly organizational founders, leaders (presidents, chief executive officers, executive directors, etc.), or senior staff (vice presidents, chief operating officers, etc.). We identified potential interviewees in these roles using desk research and, in a few instances, snowball sampling. A total of 23 percent of our interviewees had founded their organization.

We employed a two-part sampling procedure for each population to achieve a balance between capturing the perspectives of the major players in an issue area and those of smaller groups. The exact approach was tailored to the size of the population and its balance between large and small organizations. Similar to our approach with the quantitative data in Chapters 3–5, which relied heavily on US government data on nonprofits, we first used the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) dataset as a sampling frame to identify a random sample of around twelve organizations in each population. We then sorted the NCCS data by revenue to generate a list of the largest organizations in each population. Depending on the distribution of resources in the population and which groups were included in our initial random sample, we added 2–6 large organizations to the initial sample.

We used this sampling approach to generate a list of twelve organizations within each population to approach for interviews. In each sector, we included organizations founded in different time periods and used this criterion to prioritize which groups to select from our random sample. We continued conducting interviews until we felt that we had reached saturation within the population (i.e., when interviewees ceased to provide new information). This approach resulted in seven interviews in civil society and democracy, twelve interviews in the conservation sector, eighteen in the global health sector, and sixteen in the humanitarian sector. We conducted fewer interviews in the democracy population because we consulted notes from more than 100 interviews conducted by Bush for a previous project on democracy promotion nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to identify relevant material for understanding the dynamics within this sector.[8] We added extra interviews from both the large organization list and an additional random sample to achieve saturation in the global health population. In two cases, we added interviews with individuals who contacted us after receiving a survey or focus group invitation.

Our overall response rate to interview requests after three follow-ups was 79 percent. Contacted individuals very rarely declined to be interviewed; they simply did not reply to our attempts to reach them. In general, we had more nonresponses from smaller organizations. Despite vigorous Internet sleuthing, we occasionally had a difficult time identifying any staff members associated with such groups, leading us to contact generic e-mail addresses when we could. It is possible that some of the organizations we failed to reach had "died" yet still maintained an Internet presence. When we failed to reach an organization after three attempts (via email, phone, or both), we replaced that organization with another group that was founded around the same time and reported similar revenue.

7.2.3 *Interview Procedures*

Nearly all interviews were conducted remotely via Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or telephone and in English. As our respondents were busy professionals located throughout the United States, virtual meetings were more conducive to scheduling. Moreover, a good portion of our interviews were conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, when in-person research was not permitted. All interviews were, when the interviewee gave permission, recorded and transcribed. We coded the transcripts for key themes using the NVivo software program.

Interviews were typically thirty minutes in length; some lasted up to ninety minutes. We used a standardized interview protocol to facilitate

[8] Bush (2015).

semi-structured interviews. While each interview asked the same core questions (see what follows), the interviewer had discretion regarding which follow-up and additional questions to ask. Before each interview, we conducted background research on the organization where the interviewee worked to learn as much as possible about its history and approach. We also consulted biographical information about the interviewee when possible. This approach allowed us to make the most of our time by tailoring our questions to the most pertinent areas of discussion.

7.2.4 Reporting

At the outset of our interviews and as part of the process of securing interviewees' verbal consent to participate in the research, we asked them which type of attribution they preferred: (1) on the record (we could use material from the conversation in academic publications and refer to the respondent by name), (2) not for attribution (we could use the material but would not refer to the respondent by name), or (3) off the record (we couldn't use material from the conversation in academic publications).[9] We sought to design our questions to be nonsensitive, and the majority of our interviews were on the record. But some of our respondents chose the "not for attribution" option or asked for a hybrid approach – a default of "not for attribution" with the option to use key quotes with attribution if we received explicit permission, or a default of "on the record," with a few more sensitive comments treated as "not for attribution" or "off the record." In a handful of cases, respondents chose to be completely "off the record." Respondents in the humanitarian sector were the most likely to request to be off the record.

7.2.5 Interview Protocol

Table 7.1 presents the complete interview protocol, along with the rationale for including each question. Questions designated as "optional" were utilized at the interviewer's discretion. We note

[9] We gave interviewees the option to not have their identities be kept confidential since they are a relatively powerful group and in some cases preferred to be identified to have their work with INGOs enter the historical record and be useful to researchers and other practitioners.

Table 7.1 ***Interview questions***

Questions	Rationale
Background: When did you start working in the field of [name]? Which organizations have you worked for? What is your current position? How long have you been in this role?	To contextualize the respondent's answers.
Founding: How and why was your organization founded? What did the field of [name] look like at the time that your organization was founded?	To understand the founding process and its different steps. Ask respondent to describe steps in the process, with particular attention to how other organizations may have shaped decisions and the legitimacy processes that operate between groups.
Missions: Why did your organization adopt this particular mission? Has the mission changed over time in any way? If so, why?	To understand the process of mission selection, with particular attention to how market conditions might shape the kinds of issues entrepreneurs choose to focus on.
Geography: How did you decide where your organization would work? Has this changed over time? If so, why?	To understand the process of geographic selection, with particular attention to how market conditions might shape organizations' approaches.
Optional, missions: What makes your organization distinct from other organizations? What are the benefits of your approach?	To further clarify the organization's niche, if it does not come up in questions above.
Optional, funding: How is your organization funded, and has this changed over time? How does this affect your work?	To understand how resources affect organizational strategy, with particular attention to how resources are distributed among groups.
Optional, attention: How much attention is there to the issues your organization works on? Has this changed over time? How does it affect the work you do?	To understand how issue attention affects organizational strategy.

Table 7.1 ***(cont.)***

Questions	Rationale
Population density: Looking out at your field, do you think there's room for more organizations to enter the sector, or would it be difficult to create a new group? Why or why not? What are some new groups you know of, and what has been their experience?	To gauge perceptions of sector density and the factors associated with it.
Population concentration: Looking out at your field, do you think resources are more evenly distributed or more concentrated in the hands of a few groups? Has it always been this way? How does it affect how NGO [service provision/advocacy] takes place in this field? What are some examples?	To gauge perception of sector concentration and variation over time and to understand the implications of concentration for service provision. Ask for specific examples when possible.
Population competition: Are organizations in your field generally more competitive or more collaborative? Has it always been this way? How does it affect how NGO [service provision/advocacy] takes place in this field? What are some examples?	To gauge perceptions of the level of competition and variation over time. To understand the implications of competition for service provision. Ask for specific examples when possible.
Population innovation: How innovative is your sector? Are new ideas emerging regularly, or is it hard to break the mold? What are some examples of innovation in your area? Where do new ideas come from in your area, or what prevents new ideas from emerging?	To gauge perceptions of the level of, sources of, and barriers to innovation.
Competitors: Are there any other kinds of organizations that have emerged as challengers to NGOs in your area? What are the advantages and disadvantages of those groups?	To name and evaluate potential challengers.
Closing/Evaluation: When thinking about your field as a whole, how effective do you think the sum total of NGO efforts has been? What are some of the barriers to effectiveness?	To understand effectiveness as a performance outcome.

Table 7.1 *(cont.)*

Questions	Rationale
Optional, successful NGOs: Which NGO models have proven to be most successful? Why?	To have an open-ended discussion of effectiveness.
Optional, new approaches: Are there any issues or approaches within the field of [name] that are not getting the attention they deserve? Why?	To have an open-ended discussion of ineffectiveness.
Optional, challenges: What are some of the biggest successes and challenges for your organization? What have you learned over time?	To have an open-ended discussion of effectiveness.
Closing thoughts: To close, if you were to offer advice to someone considering founding a new NGO in your area, what would you tell them?	To have an open-ended discussion of the founding outcome.

Note: The interviewers used this list as a guide for what questions and follow-ups to pose during interviews.

that many of our interview questions deliberately sought to gauge perceptions (e.g., of density and competition) and that it is possible that interviewees could have had inaccurate perceptions about their organizational populations. Nevertheless, their perceptions are quite important to measure since perceptions are usually what shape organizational decision-making.

7.2.6 Organizations Sampled and Interviewed

As described previously, we identified a sample of American INGOs in four populations within which we sought to interview key staff members. Table 7.2 lists each organization that was included in that sample and whether we were able to conduct an interview with a staff member of that organization. In cases where the interviewee requested that the conversation be "off-the-record," we list it in what follows as an anonymous organization.

Table 7.2 ***Organizations sampled and interviewed***

Population	Organization	Interview?
Civil society and democracy	Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation	Yes
Civil society and democracy	America's Development Foundation	No
Civil society and democracy	Center for a Free Cuba	No
Civil society and democracy	Foundation for Culture and Society	Yes
Civil society and democracy	Foundation for Democracy in Africa	Yes
Civil society and democracy	Global Justice Center	No
Civil society and democracy	Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti	Yes
Civil society and democracy	International Center for Not for Profit Law	No
Civil society and democracy	International Judicial Academy	Yes
Civil society and democracy	International Women's Democracy Center	Yes
Civil society and democracy	National Democratic Institute	Yes
Civil society and democracy	Partners for Democratic Change	No
Civil society and democracy	Project on Middle East Democracy	No
Civil society and democracy	Vital Voices Global Partnership	No
Conservation	A Rocha USA	Yes
Conservation	Birdlife International	Yes
Conservation	Conservation International	Yes
Conservation	Elephants of Africa Rescue Society	No
Conservation	Galapagos Conservancy	Yes
Conservation	Global Wildlife Conservation (Re:wild)	Yes
Conservation	International Primate Protection League	Yes
Conservation	Nature Conservancy	Yes

Table 7.2 *(cont.)*

Population	Organization	Interview?
Conservation	Pachamama Alliance	No
Conservation	Pan African Sanctuaries Alliance	Yes
Conservation	Pandas International	Yes
Conservation	Safari Club International	Yes
Conservation	Wildlife Conservation Network	Yes
Conservation	World Wildlife Fund-US	Yes
Conservation	Anonymous Organization	Yes
Global health	Access Health International	Yes
Global health	Champs 4 Kids	No
Global health	Curamericas	Yes
Global health	Engender Health	Yes
Global health	Grassroot Health Aid Organisation (GHAPO)	Yes
Global health	Health Bridges International	Yes
Global health	Health Horizons International	Yes
Global health	Hope Foundation for Women & Children of Bangladesh	Yes
Global health	International Health Emissaries	Yes
Global health	International Health Partners – USA Inc. (IHP)	Yes
Global health	International Water and Health Alliances	Yes
Global health	Management Sciences for Health (MSH)	Yes
Global health	MAP International	Yes
Global health	Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)	Yes
Global health	Medical Teams International	Yes
Global health	Mental Health Family Mission	No
Global health	Milwaukee Medical Mission	Yes
Global health	Sekolo Projects Inc	Yes
Global health	Ubuntu Africa NFP	No
Global health	Anonymous Organization	Yes
Humanitarianism	American–Jewish Joint Distribution Committee	Yes
Humanitarianism	Americares	Yes
Humanitarianism	Childfund International	Yes
Humanitarianism	Children's Hunger Fund	Yes
Humanitarianism	Christian Relief Fund	Yes
Humanitarianism	CORUS International	Yes

Table 7.2 ***(cont.)***

Population	Organization	Interview?
Humanitarianism	Food for the Hungry	Yes
Humanitarianism	Friends of Medjugorje	No
Humanitarianism	Heart to Heart	Yes
Humanitarianism	International Committee for the Red Cross	Yes
Humanitarianism	Partnership for Supply Chain Management	Yes
Humanitarianism	Pour International Inc.	No
Humanitarianism	Rebuild Sri Lanka Foundation	No
Humanitarianism	Save the Children	Yes
Humanitarianism	Uganda Fund	Yes
Humanitarianism	UNICEF USA	Yes
Humanitarianism	Widows Mite Experience	No
Humanitarianism	Anonymous Organization	Yes
Humanitarianism	Anonymous Organization	Yes
Humanitarianism	Anonymous Organization	Yes

Note: Our methods of selecting organizations and inviting interviews to participate are discussed in the text.

7.3 Survey Methods Appendix

We conducted an original survey of American INGO leaders. This research was determined exempt by our universities' IRBs.[10] To the best of our knowledge, this was the first large-scale survey of leadership staff at international nonprofit organizations across a variety of issue areas. Previous studies either focused on single sectors, such as civil society and democracy or human trafficking,[11] or used long-form interviews on smaller samples.[12] Other related research has focused on the views of domestic NGO staffers, exploring what they view as the factors that shape their ability to secure funding.[13]

[10] University of Maryland IRB protocol number 1244959-6; Yale University IRB protocol number 2000023665.
[11] Barkan (2012); Hafner-Burton, LeVeck, and Victor (2015); Kelley (2017).
[12] Hermann et al. (2010).
[13] Springman et al. (2022).

7.3.1 Survey Mode

We conducted our survey online using the Qualtrics platform in August 2019. Respondents were invited via e-mail to take the survey. The survey was anonymous to ensure that respondents could answer questions freely and their answers could not be linked with them afterward. This survey mode was conducive to eliciting truthful responses from participants. A number of questions were about organizational strategy, and individuals' perceptions of effectiveness are potentially sensitive. Although we did our best to minimize the threats to inference posed by such sensitivities during the interviews, such as by offering to conduct them "not for attribution" or "off the record," it is difficult to eliminate them altogether. Personal settings generally put more pressure on respondents to answer in socially desirable ways.[14] Allowing respondents to answer questions about their experiences working in (and beliefs about) the international nonprofit sector in a self-administered, anonymous Internet survey thus promoted data quality.[15]

7.3.2 Survey Sample and Response Rate

Although INGO founders are drawn from the general public, the people who are most likely to have the interest and resources to found a new organization are a relatively specialized group. Following the suggestion of researchers who note the value of conducting international relations surveys of theoretically relevant elite populations,[16] a key task for this research was therefore to build a sample of INGO leaders since such a database did not already exist. We focused on INGOs headquartered in the United States, similar to our approach in Chapters 3–5.

We constructed a sampling frame of American organizations active in 2012 in the NCCS dataset.[17] We included INGOs active in eight

[14] Heerwegh (2009).

[15] The survey's experimental component's hypothetical and multidimensional design may have also alleviated any remaining social desirability concerns among elite respondents. See Dietrich, Hardt, and Swedlund (2021, 603–603).

[16] Dietrich, Hardt, and Swedlund (2021); Kertzer and Renshon (2022).

[17] As discussed in Chapter 4, although the NCCS now makes its data publicly available for free, that was not always the case, and we purchased a proprietary data release from the NCCS for use during an earlier stage of

international issue areas: conservation, civil society and democracy, global health, human rights, humanitarianism, international education, migration and refugees, and peace and security. Although these issue areas do not represent every sector of INGO activity in the United States, they cover a good variety of population types, including those that are more or less concentrated, more or less dependent on government funding, and focused on both commons issues and other issues. In this way, the survey sample was designed to be representative of a range of perspectives within the American INGO landscape. Our sample also included all of the issue areas that have received significant treatment in the political science literature on INGOs and the INGO populations with the most organizations. Thus, we expect the sample to touch on important debates about INGOs in world politics.

For each INGO in the sample, we gathered staff members' names and e-mail addresses from Internet research. As much as possible, we focused on individuals in leadership roles such as founder, president, and (for larger organizations) program director. Up to three individuals from the same organization could be included in our sample. Similar to our approach in other chapters, for larger populations (e.g., humanitarianism), we searched for contact information for a random sample of organizations in the population, whereas for smaller populations (e.g., conservation), we searched for contact information for all organizations in the population. We oversampled in smaller populations to ensure we had enough responses to explore issue-area variation in our data.

It was not possible to find contact information for any staff members for about 25 percent of the INGOs in the sample. We suspect many of these organizations no longer exist and perhaps were never very large or active. Given this missingness and other facets of our approach, our survey respondents should not be understood as a fully representative sample of leadership staff at American INGOs. Unfortunately, there is no population data on the individual leaders of INGOs in the United States against which we can benchmark the characteristics of our sample. However, our sample represents a range of perspectives in terms of issue areas, professional backgrounds, organizational

research for this book. 2012 was the most recent year to which we had access at the time when we were beginning work on this survey.

size, and organizational type (i.e., INGOs focused on service delivery, advocacy, monitoring, enforcement, or some combination thereof).

We invited 1,383 individuals via e-mail to take our survey; 197 completed it for a response rate of around 14 percent. Although we had hoped for a higher response rate, this rate compares favorably with those of other recent e-mail-based surveys of political elites.[18] To promote a high response rate, we contacted individuals multiple times, clearly communicated the project's intended broader impacts, offered to share our findings via a follow-up message, and provided a $10 electronic gift card.[19] It is not obvious why individual characteristics that may have made respondents more likely to agree to participate in our survey would bias us in favor of finding support for our theoretical expectations. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the potential for selection bias in terms of who agreed to participate.

7.3.3 Sample Characteristics

We succeeded in attracting high-level respondents to our survey, which was our goal. Over half (55 percent) of our respondents described themselves as being the leader of their organization. In addition, 40 percent of respondents reported that they had founded a nonprofit organization in the past, and 51 percent said they would consider doing so in the future. Thus, given the relevance of its sample, our survey can shed significant light on INGO entrepreneurship, both in the past and in the future.

Though they were generally seasoned leaders within the international nonprofit community, our survey respondents had experience working in a range of types of INGOs. We asked participants about

[18] It is challenging to recruit elites to participate in surveys because of the demands on their time and their concerns about privacy. Other recent online elite surveys report response rates of 4–9 percent, including a survey of politicians (Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth, 2018, 530), INGOs (Nielson, Hyde, and Kelley, 2019, 698–701), and World Bank staff (Briggs, 2021, 7). For a further discussion of elite survey recruitment for INGOs, see Safarpour, Bush, and Hadden (2022).

[19] To maintain survey respondents' anonymity, respondents were invited at the end of the survey to click through to a separate form where they could enter their e-mail addresses to receive the gift cards. Their e-mail addresses were not linked to their survey responses in any way.

the organizations where they currently worked, and the median organization in the sample was founded in the 2000s, although the survey included respondents working at organizations founded as early as the 1940s (or before) and as recently as the 2010s. The median INGO had a budget of between $500,000 and $999,999, though numerous respondents worked for organizations with an annual budget of less than $100,000 or greater than $50 million. Reflecting the fact that the respondents were relatively senior staff, 58 percent reported having ten or more years of prior work experience in their field, the median age was 45–54 years old, and 60 percent reported having a graduate degree. As expected, given the demographics of international nonprofit organization staffers, the sample skews toward those on the political left: 61 percent of respondents consider themselves Democrats, 8 percent Republicans, and 24 percent Independents.

7.3.4 *Questionnaire Design*

We developed the survey questionnaire after a pilot period in which we shared the questionnaire with a handful of long-time INGO practitioners; we used their feedback to refine the questions to improve comprehensibility. The questionnaire contained several sections. We first asked respondents a number of questions about their personal and professional backgrounds. These questions were designed to shed light on the types of individuals who work in international nonprofit organizations in the United States and on these individuals' perceptions of topics such as organizational effectiveness.

Next, the experimental component of the survey (a forced-choice conjoint experiment) was designed to identify the relationship between (1) environmental factors and (2) INGO foundings and perceived effectiveness (see discussion in Chapter 6).[20] This experiment was placed relatively early in the survey to avoid the respondents being "primed" to think about other issues related to INGOs before answering the experiment's outcome questions. After the experiment, the survey continued with further questions about the respondent's background and opinions about nonprofit organizations.

[20] Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto (2014); Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015).

7.3.5 *Data Quality*

We included timers in the survey to gauge how much attention respondents paid to the conjoint scenarios.[21] The median respondent spent about 83 seconds on each of the five conjoint task pages, which contained the hypothetical pair of scenarios and the outcome questions. Since the conjoint tasks were relatively brief and simple, we infer that most respondents were fairly engaged in the survey since they spent over a minute considering each page. As noted earlier, we took several steps designed to encourage participation and engagement, including emphasizing the importance of our results and providing a monetary incentive.

7.4 Focus Groups

We conducted four focus groups with senior staff at American INGOs in October 2022. This section describes our procedures.

7.4.1 *Recruitment and Response Rate*

Our goal for this data collection was to have open-ended conversations among senior INGO leaders who could reflect on challenges and opportunities related to INGO density, competition, innovation, and performance. To achieve this goal, we recruited participants via a random sample of mid-to-large-sized organizations across a variety of issue areas, including conservation, civil society and democracy promotion, international education, global health, humanitarianism, international development, human rights, and peace and security. We invited participants from a wider range of issue areas than we did for our interviews for three reasons, informed by suggestions for focus groups from Jennifer Cyr.[22] First, including a wider set of issue areas ensured that a more representative set of perspectives was included in our study. Second, we sought to reduce the probability that

[21] Another approach would have involved asking respondents manipulation check or treatment recall questions. We were concerned that the elite respondents – who, as noted earlier, are often difficult to encourage to participate in surveys – would find such questions annoying and might drop out if confronted with them.

[22] Cyr (2019, 43).

participants would know one another and thus perhaps be reluctant to share more critical reflections. Finally, we wanted to avoid situations in which groups were too comfortable with one another and failed to articulate assumptions that could be "taken for granted" within their sector.

We sent our e-mail invitations to senior staff based at American INGOs that we had not yet contacted for interviews or to complete our survey. We focused on recruiting high-level staff (executive directors, vice presidents, etc.) of mid-to-large-sized American INGOs. We expected these individuals to have the broadest perspective on developments in their respective populations because they had usually worked in multiple positions in the issue area in addition to their current roles. We also sought out participants with similar backgrounds (in terms of leadership positions within their organizations) so that these would be conversations among individuals with homogeneous professional expertise.[23]

Our personalized invitation e-mails specified that the focus groups would take 90 minutes and offered participants a choice of four sign-up dates. Participants who completed the focus group received a $100 gift card. We sent a total of ninety five invitations and received twenty eight initial sign-ups, for about a 29 percent response rate. However, consistent with our experience organizing other kinds of online events, only 16 (57 percent) of those who signed up attended the focus groups, usually due to other pressing professional obligations that came up. This attrition makes our final response rate around 17 percent. Despite the large number of no shows, we were still able to reach our desired group size of 3–5 high-level participants in each focus group.

7.4.2 Procedure and Reporting

The focus groups took place on Zoom due to Covid-19 restrictions on in-person research and because our participants were based in many different locations. The human subjects research was determined to be exempt by our universities' IRBs.[24] Hadden served as the moderator for each of the focus groups, with Bush as the note taker.

[23] Morgan (1997, 35).
[24] University of Maryland IRB protocol number: 1244959-6; Yale University IRB protocol number 2000023665.

After discussing consent and the study procedures, participants were invited to introduce themselves. Although the focus group participants' identities were therefore known to each other, we stipulated that we would not refer to them in an identifying way (i.e., by name or organization name) in our academic research. We believed that this arrangement would allow participants to speak freely and avoid the awkwardness of determining each individual's attribution guidelines in a group setting.

Hadden then facilitated the discussion following the protocol described in what follows. The focus groups were structured as follows: All groups considered the first four questions on the protocol and Hadden exercised discretion regarding follow-up questions and prompts directed toward certain participants. Only half of the groups had time to consider the fifth question.

All focus groups were recorded and transcribed with the participants' permission. The transcripts were coded for key themes using NVivo. In our analysis of the transcripts, we tried to identify themes in individual responses as well as to assess the degree to which groups reached consensus on the questions under consideration.[25]

7.4.3 Protocol

After introducing the study, obtaining consent, and covering the ground rules for discussion, we asked the following questions:

1. Working on difficult global issues raises a lot of challenges. Thinking about your experience in NGO work, please take a few minutes to write down three things that come to mind as potential barriers to achieving change in your issue area. Would anyone like to share?
2. In some issue areas and countries, people have observed that the number of NGOs has grown to the point that there are very few resources available to new NGOs trying to enter the field. Have you experienced that in the issue area where you work? Do you think that there's space for new organizations to enter your field?
   (a) If not, what is your perception of the issue area in which you work?
   (b) Probing/prompting: What are some examples?

[25] Cyr (2019).

3. Is there much competition between NGOs, in your experience? If so, how does competition affect NGOs' abilities to achieve their goals?
   (a) Can you give some examples?
   (b) Overall, does competition make organizations more effective or less effective? More or less efficient?
   (c) How could any negative effects of competition be mitigated?
4. What are some examples of recent "innovations" in your area? How does innovation come about?
   (a) What are some barriers to innovation?
   (b) What do you think are the best ways to encourage productive innovation in your issue area?
5. Wrapping up now, I have just one more question: Do you see other types of actors besides NGOs becoming more important in your issue area? For example, for us as college professors, some people see higher education institutions as being challenged by massive online courses or other freely available online courses. Is there something analogous in your sector?
   (a) Can you give some examples?
6. Those are all the questions I have. Is there anything that anyone would like to add?

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