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Taking Control of Regulations: How International Advocacy NGOs Shape the Regulatory Environments of their Target Countries^{*}

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A wave of legislative and regulatory crackdown on international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) has constricted the legal environment for foreign advocacy groups interested in influencing domestic and global policy. Although the legal space for advocacy is shrinking, many INGOs have continued their work and found creative ways to adapt to these restrictions, sometimes even reshaping the regulatory environments of their target countries in their favor. In this article, I explore what enables INGOs to cope with and reshape their regulatory environments. I bridge international relations and interest group literatures to examine the interaction between INGO resource configurations and institutional arrangements. I argue that specific resource and managerial characteristics provide organizations with 'programmatic flexibility' that enables groups to adjust their strategies without changing their core mission. I illustrate and test this argument with case studies of Article 19 and AMERA International and demonstrate how organizations with high programmatic flexibility can navigate regulations and shape policy in their target country, while those without this flexibility are shut out of policy discussions and often the target country itself. I conclude by exploring how the interaction between internal characteristics and institutional environments shape and constrain the effects of interest groups in global governance.

Legal crackdowns and repressive regulations for international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) have increased substantially since 2000. Dozens of authoritarian countries have passed harsh new anti-NGO laws, including Russia, Egypt, China, Bahrain, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. In 2017, CIVICUS reported that only

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3% of the world's population lives in countries that impose minimal restrictions on associational activity, while most face obstructed or repressed civic space (CIVICUS 2017; Heiss 2019). However, while the legal space for global advocacy organizations is closing, many INGOs have continued to work in their target countries and lobby governments by finding creative ways to adapt to more restrictive regulations. In some cases, international interest groups have adapted so well that they have been able to shape the regulatory environment of their target countries in their favor. What enables international advocacy NGOs to cope with repressive regulations, have advocacy effects in their target countries, and reshape their regulatory environments?

We can explore possible answers to this question by combining research on INGOs and interest groups. International advocacy NGOs fit well into the category of 'interest group' – these organizations attempt to affect government policy and influence the public good, both in domestic politics and in global governance institutions. Moreover, we can use the concept of opportunity structures to theorize the conditions under which INGOs can have advocacy effects under repressive regulations. In this paper, I examine the interaction between two of the opportunity structures identified by Dellmuth and Bloodgood ([this special issue](#)): resource configurations and institutional arrangements. Analyzing each of these structures allows these two literatures to speak to each other. For instance, in research on interest groups, institutional arrangements define the strategies available to advocacy organizations. Research on INGOs and nonprofit organizations, on the other hand, has tended to look at how the internal characteristics of INGOs (Wong 2012; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017) or the links and relationships between INGOs (Carpenter 2014) enable these organizations to be effective in global governance (Heiss and Johnson 2016). INGO research emphasizes how organizations can rely on connections with their home countries to boomerang and spiral around regulatory obstacles they face in their target countries (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse and Sikkink 1999), as INGOs turn to their home governments to exert pressure on offending governments. Accordingly, the institutional environment of INGO target countries has received much less attention in the international relations literature – the boomerang and spiral models of international advocacy allow us to assume away many of these institutional constraints. However, within international relations and interest group literatures, there is little research examining the interaction between INGO resource configurations and institutional arrangements (Bloodgood, Tremblay-Boire, and Prakash 2014; Tallberg et al. 2018). By looking at how both resources and institutions shape INGO strategies, we can generate richer theories of INGO access to domestic and global policymaking.

In this paper, I bridge research in international relations, nonprofit management, and interest group dynamics to examine how specific organizational resource

configurations provide INGOs with what I term ‘programmatically flexibility’, or the ability to navigate and manipulate the institutional constraints they face. I first examine how internal and institutional factors influence INGO strategy and explore a growing field of research that shows how INGOs navigate and take control of their regulatory environments. I then propose my primary argument: programmatic flexibility permits INGOs to respond to repressive gatekeeping regulations designed to limit their ability to engage in advocacy, and organizations that adapt to these regulations are well-positioned to then shape those regulations in their favor. I test this hypothesis with case studies of Article 19 and AMERA International, demonstrating how organizations with high programmatic flexibility are able to navigate strict regulations and shape domestic policy in their target country, while those without the resources to be flexible are shut out of policy discussions and, eventually, the target country itself. I conclude by addressing the central theoretical argument of this issue, exploring how the interaction between internal characteristics and institutional environments shape and constrain the effects of interest groups in global governance.

Resource configurations and institutional arrangements

Resource configurations, organizational culture, and managerial practices are core determinants of INGO strategy. A rich literature on nonprofit management looks at how organizations can optimize their managerial structure (Herman and Renz 2004), improve relationships with their boards (Renz 2004), effectively and ethically manage donations (Kerlin 2006), train employees and volunteers (Watson and Abzug 2010), and clearly articulate their vision through a well-crafted mission statement (Sheehan 1996) and thereby improve organizational efficiency. International relations research has begun to apply these nonprofit theories to INGOs. For instance, Wong (2012) argues that advocacy INGOs that successfully centralize proposal power while decentralizing implementation power are better able to pursue a focused agenda without stifling local creativity. In short, advocacy organizations that adhere to well-defined missions, maintain consistent funding streams, and follow managerial best practices are better able to reach their advocacy goals and affect policy change.

INGO strategy is also shaped by institutional arrangements, including the legal regulations, political trends, and cultural norms of both their home and target countries (Heiss and Johnson 2016; Gugerty and Prakash 2010). In contrast with internal organizational traits, the effect of institutions on INGOs is relatively understudied (Bloodgood, Tremblay-Boire, and Prakash 2014). Stroup (2012) shows that the organizational structures and missions of INGOs are deeply tied to the cultural and

legal environments of their home countries. Newer work has turned to the influences of target country institutions on INGOs. For instance, international advocacy organizations often engage in geographic forum shopping, establishing offices in countries with the most amenable institutional arrangements in repressive regions, or building the ‘best house in a bad neighborhood’ (Barry et al. 2015). INGO access to advocacy venues is also shaped by institutional factors. Henry et al. ([this special issue](#)) demonstrate how both home-country political institutions and international organization norms determine NGO participation in global governance institutions.

The interaction between resource configurations and institutional arrangements can make it difficult for organizations to achieve their advocacy objectives. Donor and government demands can encourage NGOs to change their strategies and create inefficiencies in programming. Government grants can crowd out and replace private donations (Kim and Van Ryzin 2014) and strict reporting requirements can shift organizational priorities towards bureaucratic compliance and away from their core missions (Suárez 2011; Bush 2015). Additionally, NGOs are highly responsive to shifting donor demands and can modify their stated missions in pursuit of consistent funding streams (Heiss and Kelley 2017; AbouAssi 2013). This institutional influence can go in the opposite direction as well – INGOs that rely on domestic NGOs for support in restrictive legal environments often reshape their missions to better fit the preferences of their local partners (Pallas and Nguyen 2018).

Repressive governments have an incentive to limit the foreign influence of guest INGOs and mitigate their potential political risks (Heiss 2019). However, attempts to control INGO activities within the target country can incur opposition from foreign countries, international organizations, and other larger INGOs – too much regulation can trigger a boomerang effect and draw out support (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Governments can instead reduce the risks of contentious INGOs by employing regulations designed both to filter out organizations before they enter the country and limit the scope of their activities once they do establish operations. Gate-keeping laws – including barriers to registration and funding – are designed to create a less tolerant institutional environment for INGOs.

Legally besieged NGOs, however, are not passive victims in this crackdown. Many advocacy organizations creatively maneuver *within* the legal environment and find workarounds for their preferred strategies. Some INGOs rely on already-registered domestic NGOs to avoid costly registration hurdles, while others send researchers in on tourist visas to gather information for reports to avoid the need to register at all (see Heiss 2017, for additional examples). However, pushing the envelope with legal innovations in restrictive countries is a doubled-edged sword: if an INGO is too creative in adapting to restrictions, it can either change its mission to remain in the target country’s good graces, or it can run afoul of the government and be expelled (Heiss 2017). That said, many INGOs have successfully walked

this tightrope, pushing and redefining legal boundaries in their target countries and often becoming co-architects of the regulations they face. Research by Teets (2014) demonstrates how advocacy INGOs have taken advantage of close connections with government officials to create a more favorable regulatory environment, as organizations invite officials to special conferences, hire retired administrators with connections to sitting bureaucrats, and publicly shame supervisory agencies that impose harsher regulations (Heiss and Kelley 2017).

Programmatic flexibility

INGOs are not always victims in the ongoing global crackdown on civil society. But what determines how and when these organizations can shape their regulatory environments? I theorize that specific organizational characteristics enable international advocacy organizations to overcome legal barriers, influence the laws and policies of their target countries, and ultimately take control of the regulations they face.

I define programmatic flexibility as the configuration of resources and managerial characteristics that allows an advocacy group to reshape its strategies in reaction to changing institutional arrangements without changing its core mission. More specifically, flexibility combines resource configurations such as consistent revenue streams, trained professional staff, strategic alignment with donor expectations, collaborative relationships with other advocacy groups, and access to multiple countries through a network of regional offices.

Organizational resource configurations are tied directly to a group's programmatic flexibility. If an organization enjoys consistent revenue, it can better cope with inevitable losses in revenue following passage of laws banning foreign funding. If an organization establishes offices in countries near more restrictive states, it can shift staff and resources out of a country when facing legal crackdown while continuing its work throughout the region. On the other hand, if donors earmark large grants for a single purpose in a single country, and an advocacy group is expelled, those funds can be tied up and inaccessible and thus lead to inflexibility. Advocacy groups with high levels of programmatic flexibility are in the best position to overcome gatekeeping regulations and other constrained institutional arrangements, access their target countries, achieve their desired advocacy goals, and finally influence policy domestically and globally. Organizations with low levels of flexibility, on the other hand, are unable to quickly cope with shifts in target-country institutional arrangements and subsequently lose access to or are banned from those countries, and thus fail to have advocacy effects.

Article 19, a prominent freedom of expression advocacy INGO, and AMERA International, an INGO advocating for refugee rights in the Middle East and Africa, illustrate the connection between internal programmatic flexibility, target country institutional arrangements, and advocacy effects on regulations. Both organizations work in the Middle East and face similar legal restrictions, but with diverging outcomes. Despite its contentious programming, Article 19 has been resilient in the face of authoritarian gatekeeping restrictions in its target countries and its programmatic flexibility has enabled it to reshape domestic policy in Tunisia and elsewhere. AMERA, on the other hand, enjoyed a cooperative relationship with Egyptian government officials as it provided services and engaged in advocacy that was non-threatening to the regime. As civic space constricted following the 2011 Arab Spring, AMERA's absence of flexibility limited its ability to adjust and forced it to withdraw from the country.

I draw on evidence from these organizations' published materials and annual reports, as well as in-person interviews with senior staff. As these interviews were performed as part of a larger project on INGO responses to authoritarian restrictions, participants were guaranteed anonymity. In each case, I identify the organization's sources of programmatic flexibility and then analyze how each either drew on these resource configurations to overcome gatekeeping restrictions, reshape domestic regulations, and strengthen global governance norms, or failed to respond to changes in regulations and subsequently exit the country.

Article 19

Article 19 takes its name from the nineteenth article of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which establishes the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The organization's stated mission is to 'work so that people everywhere can express themselves freely, access information and enjoy freedom of the press'.¹ To promote individual expression the organization publishes research papers, issues statements, and releases advocacy letters that call on governments to maintain assembly and speech rights and discourage repressive regimes from passing laws to abrogate those rights. Article 19 also works directly with local lawyers to defend the rights of people imprisoned for self-expression and lobbies and advises politicians and bureaucrats as they draft new laws to regulate expression, including the media. To ensure access to information, Article 19 consults governments and lobbies for Right to Information (RTI) laws that guarantee access to public information and promote government transparency and accountability. Article 19 has had substantial effects in both global governance structures and in its target countries' policies,

1. Article 19, 'Mission', <https://www.article19.org/pages/en/mission.html>, accessed August 2, 2017.

shaping international standards for freedom of expression and working directly with dozens of governments to establish and reform domestic laws, including Serbia, Uganda, Macedonia, and Tunisia (Berliner 2016; Landman and Abraham 2004, 32).

Sources of programmatic flexibility

Like other foreign advocacy NGOs, Article 19 has been stymied by anti-civil society laws in many of the countries it lobbies, including Egypt, Russia, China, Azerbaijan, and others. These laws, such as Russia's 2012 Foreign Agent Law, are designed to prevent domestic NGOs with ties to foreign sponsors from obtaining funding and to limit access to INGOs to carry out advocacy. However, Article 19 has been able to adapt to and circumvent many of these restrictions by drawing on its programmatic flexibility: steady streams of revenue that keep the organization afloat, partially decentralized managerial structures that provide it with global reach, and collaborative relationships with other NGOs and governments that expand its ability to lobby.

Steady revenue The bulk of Article 19's funding comes from governments and private foundations. Roughly half of its income comes from British government agencies (Stroup 2012, 180), including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development (DFID), and embassies. The remainder comes from other foreign governments, primarily Sweden and Norway, the European Commission, and American foundations, including the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Article 19 has maintained a steady flow of revenue over time, shifting and seeking out new grants as needed. For instance, after funding from the Open Society Foundations dried up in 2004, the organization replaced the shortfall with grants from the Ford Foundation (Stroup 2012, 180). In general, the organization has maintained a balanced or surplus budget, which has allowed it to expand its operations to a global scale (see top panel of Figure 1).

Geography Since the early 2000s, Article 19 has divided its advocacy work by region, assigning staff to portfolios of countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa, each overseen by an expert program officer. The organization also maintains issue-specific programs focused on law, operations, and digital advocacy, covering its work across all regions. Prior to 2005, beyond a few small regional offices in Latin America, most of Article 19's staff were based in London, with program officers traveling regularly to their assigned regions and communicating with implementing partners remotely. In 2007, the organization declared that it would establish some sort of physical presence on

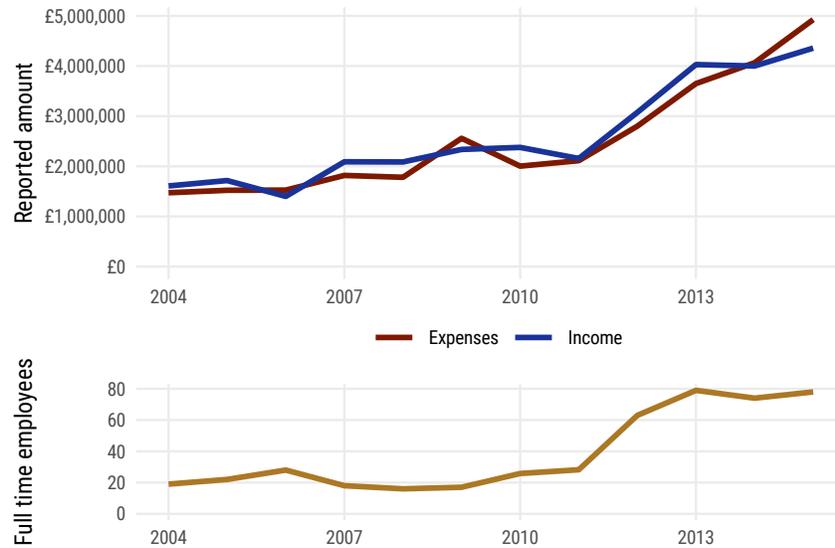


Figure 1: Article 19's income, expenditures, and full time staff, 2004-15

every continent, including the ‘posting of staff, opening of local/regional offices, and/or institutionalised partnership (franchise) with local NGOs’ (Article 19 2008, 18). Today Article 19 has a nearly global reach (see Figure 2). Each local office is governed by its own board of directors that is charged with implementing the strategy and programs organized and proposed by the central London office (Landman and Abraham 2004, 30).

Article 19’s focus on global advocacy was made possible because of this new network of regional and national offices. Between 2011–2013, the organization quadrupled the number of full time employees (see bottom panel of Figure 1) and spread its new staff to its regional offices. This global reach gives the organization increased access to government officials, enhances its ability to lobby governments, and allows it to stay abreast of regulatory changes. Most importantly, this network permits the organization to maintain a safe home in restricted regions (Barry et al. 2015), which in turn allows it to shift resources and programs around as institutional environments constrict. For instance, as legal environments for civil society worsened in Libya and Egypt, Article 19 could cut back on some of its programming while continuing to have a Middle Eastern presence with its office in Tunisia. The organization made similar regional shifts in East Africa, maintaining its headquarters in Kenya as anti-civil society laws were passed in Ethiopia and Sudan. Article

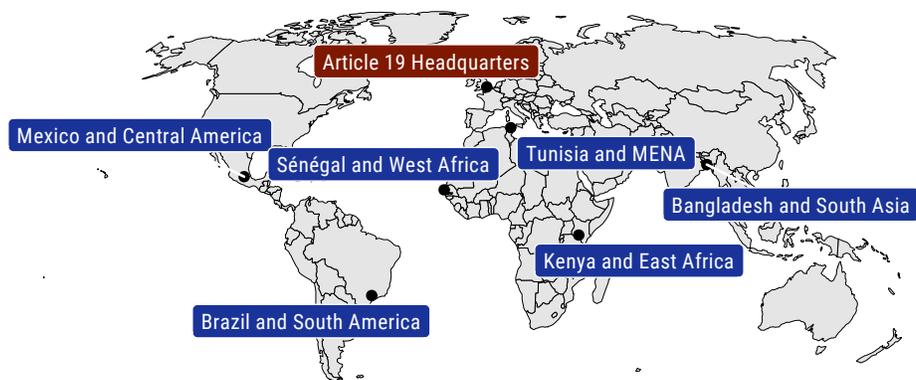


Figure 2: Article 19's headquarters and regional offices

19 remains involved in these closed countries by maintaining regional toeholds in countries with more open regulations.²

Collaboration Finally, Article 19 maintains close relationships with more than 90 different governments, IGOs, and INGOs,³ and was a founding member of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), a global network of advocacy NGOs (Sharpe 2000, 46). Today, IFEX boasts more than 100 organizational members, including prominent human rights organizations like the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Human Rights Watch, Reporters without Borders, and PEN International.⁴ Participation in issue networks like IFEX boosts Article 19's lobbying and litigation capacity and grants it access to countries and resources that are closed off due to gatekeeping regulations. For instance, Article 19 continues to issue legal analyses and censorious press releases about repression in Russia because it shares information with IFEX members who still have access to the country, like the Russia-based Mass Media Defence Centre.⁵

2. Interview 1056, October 13, 2016, London.

3. Article 19, 'What we do', <https://www.article19.org/pages/en/what-we-do.html>, accessed August 2, 2017.

4. IFEX, 'Our Network', https://www.ifex.org/our_network/, accessed August 2, 2017..

5. Article 19, 'Russia: 50+ international and Russian NGOs condemn Telegram block and Russia's assault on Internet freedom,' <https://www.article19.org/resources/russia-international-and-russian-ngos-condemn-telegram-block-and-russias-assault-on-freedom-of-expression-online/>, accessed September 29, 2018.

Confronting gatekeeping restrictions with programmatic flexibility

Moving strategic planning and implementation away from Article 19's central offices in London was designed to enhance the organization's access to remote partners, allowing it to 'respond more swiftly to opportunities or crises, ... be closer to [its] partners, work more closely with them, and thus be more capable to respond to their demands and strengthen interactions and capacities' (Article 19 2009, 38). Beyond extending the organization's global reach by moving its experts to the field, decentralization also provided legal and regulatory benefits and allowed Article 19's central offices to better handle the complexities of each country's registration regulations. These offices were formally registered according to each country's foreign NGO regulations, and to smooth the registration process and work around regulations, each office was established as part of projects funded by large donors. Article 19 Mexico, for example, was created in 2008 as part of an RTI advocacy campaign – its local registration was incidental to the overall program. Other regional offices followed a similar pattern: Article 19 Brazil and Article 19 Bangladesh were both incorporated in 2008 while implementing RTI programs funded by DFID, while Article 19 Kenya was registered in 2007 to undertake a project in Sudan funded by the European Commission and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Article 19 2009, 38). Article 19 collaborated with its funders to overcome and avoid registration hurdles. Not only did bundling the registration of its regional offices with larger grants sponsored by governmental aid agencies expedite the registration process in each country, linking registration to grant fulfillment imbued Article 19's regional offices and programs with international legitimacy.

Article 19 further ensured the success of their remote registration status by strategically selecting countries with the most amenable legal environments. In the past decade, the organization has considered establishing a more formal presence in countries like Egypt and China, but concluded that the regulatory environments for INGOs in these countries would require too many legal resources to keep any offices open.⁶ When deciding where to expand its regional offices, Article 19 selects countries where it can have the most impact – both in-country and throughout the region – with the least amount of government interference. For instance, the organization has offices in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Tunisia, which have more relaxed registration laws than their regional neighbors like India, Ethiopia, or Egypt. The organization formally registered its office in Tunisia in 2011 precisely because it was the 'safe option'.⁷ Because post-revolutionary laws regarding NGO registration were more open than any other country in the region, Tunisia became a safe central home base for Article 19's Middle Eastern programming.

6. Interview 1056, October 13, 2016, London.

7. Interview 1056, October 13, 2016, London.

Article 19 can afford to be selective in where it places its regional offices because of its programmatic flexibility. Since it already has an established headquarters in London, it can take time to deliberate and debate possible regional offices. With steady revenue, it can take more risks as it expands its programs. Additionally, because it has multiple programs spread across the world, the organization can close and relocate its offices more easily. In the 1990s, prior to the Article 19's official policy of decentralization, it incorporated Article 19 South Africa as a regional subsidiary organization. Rising operational costs and increasing difficulties with coordination led to the office's closure in 2004 (Stroup 2012, 180; Article 19 2005b), but leaving the country did not end the organization's regional programming. From its base in London, the organization continued to hold workshops, lobby politicians, consult bureaucrats, and litigate against censorship throughout the region (Article 19 2005a, 2006).

Drawing on programmatic flexibility to shape regulations When working in countries with restricted civic space, the organization bundles issues of expression and assembly and lobbies for both simultaneously, arguing that 'the defence of freedom of expression and access to information is essentially the defence of civic space' (Article 19 2015, 8). This, in turn, has powerful knock-on effects: improving the legal environment in one country allows the organization to maintain its access throughout the region and have advocacy effects on global expression and associational laws.

Tunisia provides a prime example of how the organization's resource configuration allows it to overcome gatekeeping restrictions *and* influence policy and regulations. Article 19 began working in the country in 2005 as part of the Tunisia Monitoring Group (IFEX-TMG), a special eight-year endeavor organized by IFEX. Working with regional and international partners such as the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, Index on Censorship, Freedom House, and the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, IFEX-TMG sent regular fact-finding and consulting missions to Tunisia, culminating in multiple reports outlining legislative recommendations to enhance media freedom, end censorship, and improve the rights of association, assembly, and movement (IFEX-TMG 2005, 2010). Under President Ben Ali's rule, few of the recommendations had a chance of being implemented. However, following the president's overthrow during the 2011 Arab Spring, Article 19 was ideally positioned to influence human rights policy in the country, and it opened a formal regional office in Tunis. Building on relationships established during IFEX-TMG missions, newly-elected Tunisian politicians solicited technical advice from Article 19 on issues related to freedom of expression and human rights more generally. The organization held workshops for legislators, offered regular comments on the nascent constitution, and worked with the president and party chairs to ensure that the legal environment for speech and assembly in the newly

democratizing country would be safe and inviting (Article 19 2013). In January 2014, the country's National Constituent Assembly (NCA) adopted a new constitution that generally accorded with international human rights standards. Prominent politicians cited Article 19's assistance throughout the drafting process, including interim president Moncef Marzouki and NCA president Mustapha Ben Jafar (Article 19 2015, 16).

Despite these new constitutional protections, subsequent governments have continued to infringe on expression rights. However, secure in its legal status, Article 19 has been able to continue its work in Tunisia, issuing 87 advocacy letters and statements since the fall of Ben Ali in 2011, condemning government abuses, censorship, and arrests of journalists and activists. The organization's close connections with local politicians – as well as the more permissive legal environment for advocacy in general – allow Article 19 to continue its mission and litigate against the government.

Additionally, Article 19 has been able to use Tunisia as a regional home base. Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, and other Middle Eastern countries have all imposed strict gatekeeping regulations, either by preventing registration or by imposing rules that make human rights advocacy illegal. To get around these restrictions, Article 19 brings regional activists to its Tunisia office for training and research, rather than sending staff to those more restrictive countries.⁸ Accordingly, despite closed and dangerous civic space, Article 19 has been able to continue its post-Arab Spring advocacy, issuing reports and policy briefs to countries throughout the region. Using its Tunisian office as a regional hub and tool for circumventing gatekeeping laws, however, is only possible because of the organization's programmatic flexibility. Collaboration with IFEX-TMG, politicians, and local NGOs in the years prior to the revolution, consistent government- and foundation-based funding, and highly trained staff allowed Article 19 to rapidly establish an office in 2011 and have positioned the organization to remain active in the region.

The laws impeding Article 19's work are generally designed to make operating an INGO abroad more difficult and costly. Article 19 has been able to adapt to these increasingly onerous gatekeeping regulations and continue with its advocacy by relying on its large budget, its large menu of possible programs, its longstanding target government partnerships, and its network of regional offices.

AMERA

Article 19's reserves of programmatic flexibility allowed it to circumvent gatekeeping regulations, maintain an antagonistic relationship with its target countries, and

8. Interview 1056, October 13, 2016, London.

ultimately reshape regulations to be more favorable when needed. The case of Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA)⁹ International, in contrast, demonstrates how sudden changes in a target country's institutional arrangements can pose challenges to advocacy groups low in flexibility,

Mission and strategy

AMERA was an international advocacy NGO that provided legal services for refugees in Egypt and lobbied for improved refugee policies throughout the region. Driven by the belief that 'legal aid ... is the right of all refugees',¹⁰ AMERA's mission was to 'provide pro bono legal aid for refugees in countries where such services are non-existent or limited and where legal representation might assist them in actualizing their rights'.¹¹ Since its incorporation in 2003, AMERA has provided a variety of programs, including pro bono litigation and advocacy, refugee status determination, social support for survivors of human trafficking and sex- and gender-based violence, resettlement assistance, and assistance for unaccompanied minors.

Sources of programmatic flexibility (and inflexibility)

AMERA benefitted from multiple sources of flexibility, including well-trained staff and close collaborative relationships with similar refugee rights organizations, but because of irregular and uncertain revenue, it was unable to continue operating as the legal environment in Egypt constricted. Consequently, it was unable to exert advocacy effects on the Egyptian government and reshape refugee or civil society regulations.

Staff with local connections AMERA had a small, highly experienced staff, ranging from 20–30 full time employees between 2004 and 2013, split between its UK and Egypt offices (see bottom panel of Figure 3).¹² The organization also relied on volunteer interns to help with paralegal, administrative, and translation work. Staff and volunteers were diverse, well-trained, and fit the needs of the organization's constituents, providing AMERA with the necessary language skills, legal expertise,

9. As described below, there is a legal distinction between AMERA UK, AMERA Egypt, and AMERA International. For the sake of narrative simplicity, I refer to the organization as AMERA unless describing something specific to the organization's operations in the UK or Egypt.

10. AMERA UK, 'Objectives and History', <https://web.archive.org/web/20130820091141/http://amera-uk.org/index.php/who-we-are/objectives-a-history>, accessed August 2, 2017.

11. AMERA International, 'Background', <http://www.amerainternational.org/background/>, accessed August 2, 2017; AMERA International, 'Who We Are', <http://www.amerainternational.org/who-we-are/>, accessed August 2, 2017.

12. AMERA's fiscal year ends on January 31 of the following year. To align its financial reports with a January–December calendar year, I shift all reported numbers back one year. Thus, financial figures for the year ending on January 31, 2009 are marked as 2008.

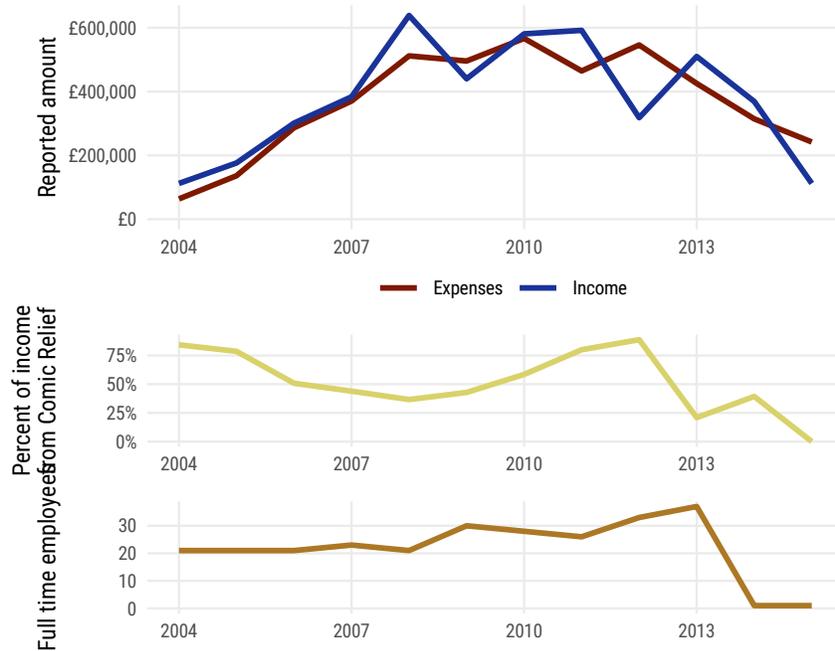


Figure 3: AMERA's income, expenditures, and full time staff, 2004-15

psychologists, and community outreach to provide legal aid and representation to nearly 1,400 clients (AMERA UK 2011, 3). Egyptians on staff gave AMERA resources to confront the changing legal environment, while staff and volunteers from Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea allowed the organization to maximize its contacts in the refugee community in Cairo.

Geography Unlike Article 19, which operates in dozens of countries from its home and regional offices, AMERA did not enjoy geographic flexibility. AMERA's refugee assistance requires direct one-on-one legal advocacy on the ground, thus the organization was naturally limited in their geographic scope. AMERA UK was created to be an overarching international umbrella organization for assisting with refugee rights and advocacy throughout the global south (AMERA UK 2008, 3), and the organization began with regional headquarters in Egypt and a pilot refugee law program in Uganda. AMERA's work in Uganda was an early success, and its pilot program was soon spun off into an independent NGO.¹³ In 2012, AMERA UK identified and began working with new partners in Morocco (Droit et Justice) and Cameroon (Refugee Welfare Association Cameroon) (AMERA UK 2013), but due

13. AMERA's fundraising commitments for this spinoff ended in 2013 (AMERA UK 2014)

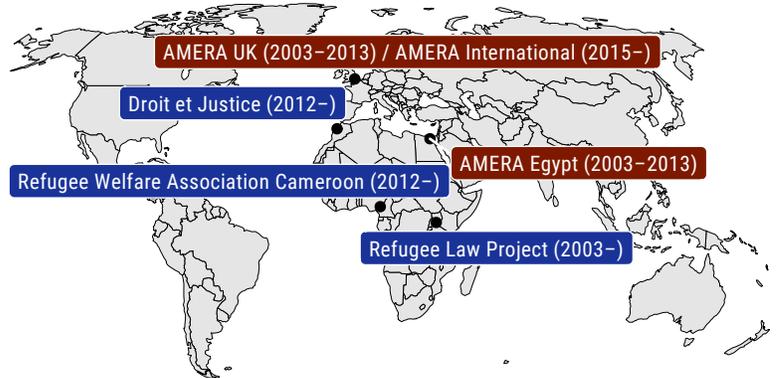


Figure 4: AMERA's offices and primary partners

to budget crises and legal challenges in Egypt, the expansion was slow. Moving its programs between countries that impose legal restrictions was not an effective response to legal crackdowns.

Collaboration AMERA cultivated partnerships with refugee and human rights organizations from its headquarters in Egypt, including the Egyptian Foundation for Refugee Rights, Caritas, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), St. Andrews Refugee Services, Catholic Relief Services, and the El Nadeem Center for Psychological Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture. In partnering with these organizations, AMERA Egypt was able to connect refugees with additional psychological, financial, and legal support, as well as shelter, food, family reunion services, education, and medical care. More importantly, this collaboration put AMERA at the center of a growing network of refugee-related NGOs in Cairo (AMERA UK 2014, 2), a position that later proved instrumental for continued service provision after the organization left the country.

Unsteady revenue AMERA's most significant obstacle was its inconsistent and unpredictable revenue (see Figure 3). Since its inception, the organization received the majority of its funding from donations from Comic Relief, a UK-based nonprofit that raises money through annual comedy broadcasts. As seen in the middle panel of Figure 3, grants from Comic Relief accounted for 85% of AMERA's income in 2004 and between 50-90% of the organization's revenue thereafter. Comic Relief funding dropped in 2013, just as AMERA Egypt faced the most regulatory pressure, and by 2015 the two organizations' partnership ended.

Recognizing its lack income diversification, in 2007 AMERA UK hired a new executive director tasked with stabilizing the organization's revenue (AMERA UK 2009, 2). The organization received grants from the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the Amberstone Trust, the Ford Foundation, and from the US State Department and the Swiss and US embassies in Cairo. AMERA's income peaked at more than £600,000 in 2008, but in subsequent years the organization slowly lost its foundation and government funding, and by 2015, it was funded exclusively by a grant from the State Department and £5,000 in private donations. The loss of funding from Comic Relief and the inability to maintain regular foundation and government funding put AMERA in a precarious situation as it confronted legal and safety challenges in Egypt.

Succumbing to gatekeeping restrictions and shutting down

AMERA's most challenging legal obstacle – and the issue that led to its withdrawal from the country – was its inability to formally register as a civil society organization, which in turn posed a threat to its safety and continued operations in Egypt. Unlike AMERA's Refugee Law Project in Uganda, AMERA Egypt did not become fully independent.

Prior to the 2011 Arab Spring, advocacy organizations in Egypt were regulated by Law 84 of 2002, which required that all civil society organizations be registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In practice, however, Egyptian officials enforced this law with great discretion and many NGOs did not register. AMERA UK began the process of registering AMERA Egypt as its official branch in Cairo in 2010, having already worked in the country for several years (AMERA UK 2011, 3). One director noted that '[b]ecause we were doing what the government was happy to have done, the government tolerated us',¹⁴ despite the lack of official registration. AMERA Egypt partnered with a local law firm that provided pro bono legal support for the registration process (AMERA UK 2012, 7), and it waited for its application to wind through the Egyptian bureaucracy.

In 2011, however, the institutional environment for all INGOs working in Egypt changed dramatically. Initially, the organization's primary concern was safety, as protests leaned towards violence in the months following Hosni Mubarak's resignation. AMERA Egypt periodically shut down its main offices during the worst political unrest, and staff met with clients offsite to continue the organization's work with as few interruptions as possible (AMERA UK 2012, 2). Despite the turbulence, AMERA continued to assist with asylum applications, legal consulting, and victim counseling, but at the same time, its UK trustees began to set aside reserves to ensure that the organization could 'meet the costs of closure or wind-down' if

14. Interview 1036, August 17, 2016.

circumstances warranted it (AMERA UK 2012, 5). The registration application with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stalled amidst the political upheaval.

Beginning in 2012, the legal landscape shifted again, as post-revolutionary governments proposed draft legislation designed to severely restrict advocacy organizations with foreign connections. AMERA continued its work through 2012 and 2013, but a large influx of refugees from Syria and a dramatic drop in revenue combined with an increasingly restricted regulatory environment to put incredible pressure on the organization. AMERA Egypt increasingly relied on assistance from its partners, working with ten other advocacy organizations to supplement their services. AMERA's registration application remained in flux as members of parliament debated the draft anti-NGO legislation. Without formal registration, AMERA Egypt would not be able to obtain permission to receive funding from AMERA UK, and the organization would shut down.

The relationship between AMERA Egypt and the Egyptian government remained mostly amicable – police never raided their offices, detained staff, or confiscated resources. Every time the organization communicated with its partners at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they were told that the application was in order, but final approval from the Ministry never arrived and their registration status was perpetually pending. In 2013, AMERA UK worried that the *détente* would soon come to an end. The Ministry had upped its pressure on other INGOs like Oxfam, and state security forces regularly raided local NGOs receiving foreign funding. By the end of 2013, AMERA UK 'saw the handwriting on the wall', assumed that its legal status would never be secured, and began the process of transferring the operations of AMERA Egypt to the Egyptian Foundation for Refugee Rights (EFRR).¹⁵

In 2014, AMERA UK closed AMERA Egypt, temporarily reincorporated as the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) in the UK (IRRI 2015), and continued to send grants to EFRR, though with little input into the management of its programs. In October 2014, EFRR took full control over all programs and in 2015, IRRI completed its drawdown from Egypt, changed its name to AMERA International, and slowly began to expand its fundraising and training activities in Morocco and Cameroon (AMERA International 2015). In the face of additional civil society restrictions, AMERA Egypt lacked sufficient resources and flexibility to maintain its access to the country. While the organization's strong relationships with the Cairene refugee community and local politicians and bureaucrats put AMERA in a position to lobby for improved refugee and advocacy laws, it was unable to do so because of its limited flexibility.

15. Interview 1036, August 17, 2016.

Conclusion

These two case studies reveal fruitful connections between INGO and interest group research. For both Article 19 and AMERA, the interaction between internal resource configurations and the external institutional arrangements in their target countries shaped these organizations' strategies and potential for having effects on domestic and global policy. A key factor in these organizations' disparate outcomes is programmatic flexibility. Endowed with reliable funding, longstanding relationships with government officials, and deep connections with local partners and larger networks of other advocacy organizations, Article 19 engaged in geographic venue shopping, overcame Tunisian gatekeeping regulations, reshaped its legal environment, and maintained the contentiousness of its mission in Tunisia and throughout the region. AMERA's departure from Egypt, on the other hand, occurred not only because the institutional environment worsened, but because it lacked sufficient programmatic flexibility to cope with changing regulations. In the face of regulatory, organizational, and financial uncertainty, the organization ceased its advocacy work and left the country. Both organizations faced similar regulatory constraints – neither organization ever successfully registered in Egypt, for instance – but Article 19 benefited from its flexibility and continued its work, while AMERA could not.

The findings from these two case studies also raise important questions and caveats. Is there a threshold of institutional arrangements that makes a country more amenable to advocacy group work and that allows INGOs to have policy effects? Article 19 has not set up an office in North Korea, and it purposely avoided using Egypt as its regional home – instead it chose the country with the most manageable (and manipulatable?) regulatory environment. What determines when a country becomes more or less attractive to advocacy organizations shopping for a new headquarters?

Similarly, is there a threshold of programmatic flexibility or a specific combination of resource configurations that allow organizations to adapt to regulations? Would the outcomes of the cases have been different had Article 19 lost the bulk of its funding or if AMERA had a wider network of permanent offices throughout the region that it could have used to absorb its Egypt office? Relatedly, configurations of resources may interact differently depending on institutional context. For INGOs working in countries that ban funding from foreign donors, reliance on deep-pocketed foreign donors can be a liability more than an asset. Even if laws do not prohibit foreign funding, INGOs working in countries that are antagonistic to their main donors (e.g. accepting USAID or DFID funding while working in Russia or Central Asia) will limit programmatic flexibility and force organizations to rely on other resource configurations.

Though these questions remain unanswered in this paper, they pave the way for exciting research agendas that continue to combine theories of resource configurations and institutional arrangements in international advocacy and global governance.

Conflict of interest statement

The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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