

Research statement

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My research blends international relations and comparative politics with public policy and nonprofit management to explore the triangular relationship between domestic governments, domestic civil society, and international civil society, analyzing three related questions: (1) how states regulate and interact with domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), (2) how domestic and international nongovernmental NGOs operate within the political contexts of their host countries, and (3) how domestic and international NGOs work with each and influence each other. My work also advances theories of organizational effectiveness, comparative and international nonprofit management, and public administration.

Over the past decade, international NGOs (INGOs) have become increasingly active in authoritarian regimes as they respond to emergencies, assist with development, or advocate for human rights. Though these services and advocacy can challenge the legitimacy and power of the regime, many autocratic states permit INGO activities and INGOs continue to work in these countries despite the sometimes heavy restrictions on their activities. In my dissertation, I theorize that this relationship between INGOs and autocrats creates a state of amicable contempt, where each party is aware that the other threatens—yet sustains—their existence.

Autocrats see global civil society as a strategic player in their domestic political landscape. International NGOs can help autocrats maintain regime stability and remain in power by providing services and expertise, bestowing a sheen of international legitimacy and reputation, and offset domestic institutional challenges. At the same time, though, INGOs pose a risk to autocrats. Their missions and goals might conflict with the regime—for instance, a human rights INGO might condemn a leader who relies on torture to control dissidents. To address this dilemma, autocrats use specific and careful strategies for enjoying the political, social, and other practical benefits of INGOs while simultaneously offsetting the costs and risks of letting these organizations operate in their country. One of their primary methods for controlling INGOs is through regulation and restriction. I use a range of tightly integrated research methods to explore the factors driving the amicable contempt between autocrats and INGOs. Combining Bayesian statistical analysis of a cross-sectional dataset of 97 autocracies with more detailed process tracing in three autocracies (Egypt, China, and Russia), I explore the determinants of authoritarian civil society restrictions, testing the effect of a regime's concerns of internal stability, external stability, and international reputation on its civil society regulatory environment. This environment constricts the longer an autocrat stays in power and in response to political instability and violent protests in the region. Importantly, however, there are conditions under which autocrats make concessions to INGOs—when autocracies become more politically stable and allow opposition parties to be more involved in domestic politics, and when regimes witness coups and nonviolent protests in neighboring countries, the regulatory environment for civil society can expand.

International NGOs understand this contentious relationship with their host countries and work to adjust and adapt to the political environment. Parallel to the cost-benefit calculus of their host governments, INGOs seek to balance their need to pursue their work (often in opposition to the regime) against the risk of acting as a political pawn of the regime and propping it up. I explore this dynamic by combining the results from global survey of nearly 650 international NGOs with four detailed case studies of education and freedom of expression INGOs: Article 19, AMERA International, Index on Censorship, and the International Republican Institute. Rather than passively accepting the regulatory environment imposed on them, INGOs work to either shape that environment or adjust their programs and strategies to maintain access to the country. I find that INGOs prefer to adapt to authoritarian regulations by making instrumental adjustments to their strategies. When facing increased restrictions, organizations will often shift their resources to less threatening programs, move their headquarters to a different region within the country, change how many foreigners are part of their in-country staff, or seek out less confrontational sources of funding. INGOs are far more resistant to changing their underlying principles—many would rather leave a country than fundamentally change their missions when the environment is no longer amenable to their work. However, because of the costs involved in confronting and adapting to their regulatory environment, not all INGOs are able to make these adjustments, and organizations often adjust to fit regime preferences or exit the country.

The findings from my dissertation research make two broader contributions to both political science and public policy and nonprofit management. First, research on authoritarian institutions has shown that dictators are rarely

omnipotent—autocrats must carefully balance external actors and institutions to remain in power. To do so, authoritarian regimes often adopt quasi-democratic political institutions such as free elections, an independent judiciary, or parliamentary councils to offset domestic pressure, boost internal and international reputation, and allow for a measure of institutional dissonance. My research advances institutional theory by demonstrating that international civil society should be treated as yet another institution that a regime must balance and reckon with. Second, recent research in nonprofit management and public administration has begun to explain and predict INGO behavior, identifying factors that influence the programming and advocacy that an organization might undertake, such as an INGO's internal decision making structures, its network ties with other organizations, or the managerial and philanthropic norms of its home country. My research enriches this field by identifying how the regulatory environment and domestic politics of an INGO's target country affect its behavior. In attempting to change policies and improve human rights in authoritarian countries, INGOs put themselves at risk of being influenced by the very regimes they target. By outlining the conditions under which INGOs are controlled and by examining how these organizations work within and around regulations, I enhance our understanding of international relations theory, which has largely ignored the effect of state influence on foreign NGOs, and foreign policy and public policy theory, which has presumed that INGOs can influence reform and encourage development without being affected themselves.

I have published several articles related to the theoretical and empirical work in my dissertation. A coauthored essay in *The Journal of Politics* offers an organizing framework for understanding the dual pressures of home and target countries on international NGO activities. A coauthored essay in *International Studies Review* outlines a typology for organizing the field of research on INGO behavior, identifying the internal, interactive, and institutional influences that shape INGO activities. A coauthored paper in *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* uses agent-based modeling and simulation to identify one of these behavioral influences—the effect of nonprofit collaboration. Another coauthored article in the *Journal of Human Trafficking* uses the survey methodology from my dissertation to investigate the global anti-human trafficking INGO community's relationship to the United States State Department, one of the sector's principal funders. I am planning on publishing parts of my dissertation research in top academic journals such as *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Public Administration Review*, and *International Organization*. I also have several working papers awaiting revisions prior to publication—one uses statistical analysis to determine the effect of anti-NGO legal barriers on grants given by national aid agencies like USAID and DFID, and demonstrates that Western governments reduce their total aid and redirect funds to issues that are less politically sensitive, and another uses computational linguistics and statistics to analyze how state-owned and independently run media organizations in Egypt cover NGO actions.

My next research project will explore another aspect of the domestic government–domestic NGO–international NGO relationship. In my next research project, I will continue to explore the relationship between NGOs and the domestic institutions that influence them. I am planning a survey experiment to determine the effect of anti-NGO laws on private and corporate giving, and I have research in progress looking at the bidirectional influence between INGOs and host countries—in several countries, advocacy INGOs have been able to lobby their host governments for a more favorable regulatory environment, which in turn improves these organizations' ability to fight public corruption and engage in effective advocacy. This line of research will contribute to debates over the role of foreign non-state actors in domestic politics and the importance of global civil society in domestic governance.

Beyond the contributions my research makes to theories of autocratic survival and international NGO behavior, my research provides useful policy guidance for international donors and transnational activists, providing mechanisms and strategies that can improve and enhance INGO effectiveness in authoritarian regimes. For instance, donors and foundations that support INGOs should worry about the domestic politics of the countries these organizations target, focusing in particular on the likelihood that regimes might capture or co-opt INGOs working there. When setting conditions for funding, donors should ensure that INGOs have more programmatic flexibility so they can more easily navigate the regulatory environment in their target countries.

Thus, by integrating a variety of research methods, I explore issues of international relations, authoritarian institutions, global governance, and NGO strategy, management, and policy. This work makes theoretical progress in each of these different fields and provides practicable policy guidance for practitioners. More information about my ongoing and future research can be found on my CV, andrewheiss.com, and ingoresearch.org.