The Effect of Government Repression on Civil Society: Evidence from Cambodia

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Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are a core component of a robust civil society and operate in a wide variety of sectors, ranging from service delivery to political advocacy. However, research has yet to systematically investigate whether the impact of government repression varies across NGO activities. We hypothesize that advocacy NGOs are more affected by repression than those in service delivery. Surveying 176 employees from 106 NGOs in Cambodia, we employ a conjoint experiment to examine how the level of repression affects a task crucial to NGOs' survival: obtaining funding via grant applications. We find that while increases in the severity of repression appear to have a stronger deterrent effect for advocacy NGOs, repression has a large deterrent effect on service NGOs as well. Interviews and text analysis of open-ended questions suggest that local officials target both advocacy and service delivery NGOs, but for different reasons. Our findings speak to the spread of authoritarianism and the challenges NGOs face in countries with closing civic spaces.

Las ONG son un componente central de una sociedad civil sólida y operan en una gran variedad de sectores, desde la prestación de servicios hasta la promoción política. Sin embargo, todavía no se ha investigado sistemáticamente si el impacto de la represión gubernamental varía según las actividades de las ONG. Nuestra hipótesis es que las ONG de defensa se ven más afectadas por la represión que las de prestación de servicios. En la encuesta que realizamos a 176 empleados de 106 ONG de Camboya, utilizamos un experimento conjunto para examinar cómo el nivel de represión afecta a una tarea crucial para la supervivencia de las ONG: la obtención de fondos mediante la solicitud de subvenciones. Descubrimos que, si bien el aumento de la intensidad de la represión parece tener un mayor efecto disuasorio para las ONG de defensa, también lo tiene para las ONG de servicios. Las entrevistas y el análisis de texto de las preguntas abiertas sugieren que los funcionarios locales se dirigen tanto a las ONG de defensa como a las de prestación de servicios, pero por diferentes motivos. Nuestras conclusiones hablan de la propagación del autoritarismo y de los desafíos a los que se enfrentan las ONG en países con espacios cívicos en vías de cierre.

Les ONG constituent une composante fondamentale d'une société civile solide et opèrent dans une large variété de secteurs, allant de la prestation de services à la défense des intérêts politiques. Cependant, les recherches n'ont pas encore étudié systématiquement si l'impact de la répression gouvernementale variait selon les activités des ONG. Nous émettons l'hypothèse que les ONG de défense d'intérêts sont davantage affectées par la répression que celles qui opèrent dans la prestation de services. Nous avons mené une enquête auprès de 176 employés de 106 ONG du Cambodge ainsi qu'une expérimentation conjointe visant à examiner la manière dont le niveau de répression affectait une tâche cruciale à la survie des ONG : l'obtention de financements par le biais de demandes de subventions. Nous avons constaté que bien que les augmentations de la gravité de la répression semblaient avoir un effet dissuasif plus puissant sur les ONG de défense d'intérêts, la répression a également un effet dissuasif important sur les ONG de services. Les entretiens et l'analyse de texte des questions ouvertes suggèrent que les officiels locaux ciblent à la fois les ONG de défense d'intérêts et les ONG de prestation de services, mais pour des raisons différentes. Nos conclusions contribuent aux débats sur la propagation de l'autoritarisme et les défis auxquels les ONG sont confrontées dans les pays où les espaces civiques se referment.

Introduction

No fundamental social change occurs merely because government acts. It's because civil society, the conscience of a country, begins to rise up and demand… change.

Joseph R. Biden Jr.

Civil society has been a force for political change and democratic accountability around the world (Carothers 2020). Understanding this, governments with authoritarian tendencies often use harassment to repress the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and thereby limit oversight and mobilization by civil society. Efforts to constrain the activities of NGOs have increased dramatically over the last fifteen years (Youngs and Echagüe 2017, 9). However, authoritarian incumbents are strategic actors who have interests in encouraging NGO work that is compatible with their interests, such as health or public education services,
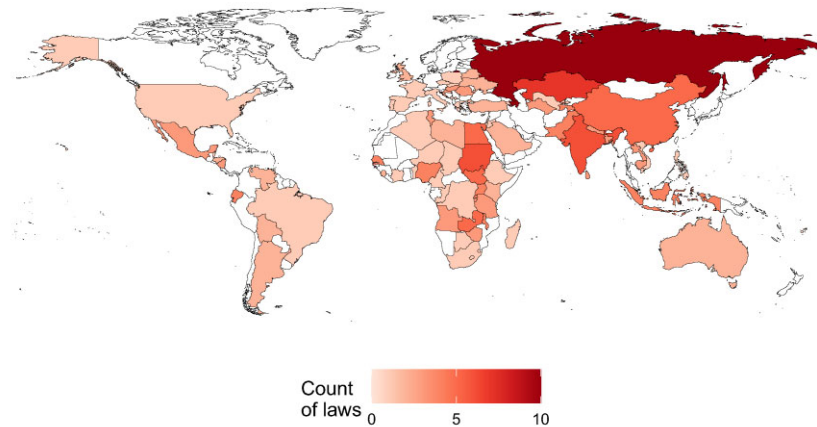
Restrictive NGO Laws Enacted (2009−2019)

Figure 1. This map shows the number of laws implementing restrictions on the NGO sector enacted between 2009 and 2019 for each country. White indicates countries did not enact any restrictive laws over this ten-year period.
Source: Original dataset with global coverage compiled by DevLab@Duke from the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law NGO Law Tracker and the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index.

while discouraging work that is more threatening, such as political advocacy. While previous work has documented differential behavior toward NGOs by leaders in authoritarian regimes (Heiss and Kelley 2017), there remains relatively little work on how NGOs in different sectors anticipate and respond to potential harassment in their daily operations. In this paper, we theorize and provide an empirical investigation of how the threat of harassment influences the choices advocacy versus service delivery NGOs make in their pursuit of external funding, arguably their most important professional activity.

Increases in the use of repression often follow the enactment of new regulations on the nonprofit sector. Figure 1 shows that between 2009 and 2019, ninety countries and territories around the world enacted laws that imposed new restrictions or requirements on NGOs. These "NGO laws" often include vaguely worded provisions that allow for selective enforcement by government authorities, providing considerable discretion and new methods to disrupt the activities of targeted NGOs (Christensen and Weinstein 2013; Chaudhry 2016; Heiss 2017). While existing research has focused on explaining cross-country variation in the adoption of NGO laws (Christensen and Weinstein 2013; Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash 2016) and estimating the response of donors (Chaudhry and Heiss 2018, 2020; Dupuy and Prakash 2018), very little work has considered how these laws (and the repression that follows) affect the operations of NGOs on the ground. Furthermore, most existing empirical work has either conflated NGOs working across different sectors under the broad banner of civil society (Viterna, Clough, and Clarke 2015) or focused primarily on advocacy NGOs without considering how NGOs working in other sectors are influenced (Murdie 2014, 72). This gap limits our ability to understand how the global phenomenon of closing civic space affects important outcomes, including the functioning of civil society, levels of non-state service delivery, and the strategic trade-offs governments face in deploying repression.

We argue that NGOs respond to the increased use of repression by modifying their behavior to avoid contact with repressive government authorities. However, if governments are strategic in their deployment of repression, the effects of closing civic space on the behavior of NGOs should

vary based on the sector in which NGOs operate. Previous research has shown that governments are more likely to target repression toward NGOs engaged in activities that are threatening to the regime, such as political advocacy and human rights work (Murdie 2014; Teets 2014); we term such organizations "advocacy NGOs." We expect that because advocacy NGOs are more likely to be targeted by government repression, they will adjust their behavior to preemptively avoid it. At the same time, as strategic government actors seek to encourage the continuation of beneficial NGO service provision, we expect that organizations engaged in more innocuous service delivery activities—"service NGOs"—will be less likely than their advocacy-oriented counterparts to change their behavior in the face of increased repression of civil society.

Using a factorial, discrete choice conjoint survey experiment fielded on 176 employees from 106 NGOs in Cambodia, we investigate one crucial way in which NGOs might adjust their behavior to preemptively avoid repression: by avoiding grants that require the organization to work in a locality where government harassment of NGOs is severe. Competitively awarded grants from foreign donors are the lifeblood of developing-country NGOs, as they are the chief means by which they fund their activities, infrastructure, and personnel. In Cambodia, it is estimated that 85 percent of NGO funding comes from foreign donors (USAID 2017). Grants typically require that NGOs complete a labor-intensive application process and require the recipient to engage in specific activities in specific locations.

To simulate a realistic grant application decision, we present respondents with two grant profiles that randomly vary on four dimensions—the donor, the value of the grant, the extent to which the grant's activities are aligned with the organization's core competencies, and the severity of NGO harassment in the district where the grant activities will take place. We then ask respondents to select which of the two hypothetical grants their organization would be more likely to apply for. We compare the effect of harassment severity in the grant's location to other grant attributes, allowing us to precisely estimate its impact on this key NGO activity. Because we can compare the average marginal component effect (AMCE) of harassment on grant selection to a similar AMCE for funding size, our design also allows us to roughly

benchmark the amount of grant funding that NGOs are willing to forego in order to avoid working in highly repressive settings.

We find strong evidence that NGOs are eager to avoid working in locations with more severe forms of harassment. All else equal, respondents are 23 percent less likely to apply for a grant in an otherwise similar district where local authorities have arrested NGO staff compared to a grant in a district with no harassment. This decrease in the probability of grant selection is equivalent to the difference in the likelihood of applying for a $20,000 grant compared to a $60,000 grant. In other words, NGOs are willing to abjure roughly $40,000 in grant funding to avoid working in locations where government harassment of NGOs has been severe. To put this number in perspective, the median value of all grants received in the last fiscal year for NGOs in our sample is $138,000. This $40,000 "harassment penalty" is thus equivalent to nearly 30 percent of the median NGO's income from grants in 2019. Given the modest budgets and permanent fundraising challenges of Cambodian NGOs, this repression penalty represents a substantial constraint to NGO finances and operating capacity.

Next, we consider how the effect of harassment on a respondent's selection of a grant profile varies by the sector in which the respondent's NGO works. Consistent with our expectations, we find suggestive evidence that the substantive effects of government harassment are larger for NGOs that focus on advocacy compared to those that focus on services. All else equal, advocacy NGOs are 58 percent more likely than service NGOs to select a grant to apply for when there is no warning about harassment. Thus, the "harassment penalty" incurred by advocacy NGOs is substantially larger than the $40,000 incurred by the average NGO in our sample. In short, NGO harassment disproportionately disincentivizes advocacy work.

However, we do find that service NGOs are also sensitive to harassment. The typical service NGO is willing to forego about 31 percent of its grant income to avoid operating in places with more severe forms of harassment. Despite previous research suggesting that governments face strong incentives to target repression at advocacy NGOs and away from service NGOs (Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash 2015; Springman 2020, 2022), the willingness of service NGOs to forego larger grants in order to avoid operating in contexts with more harassment implies that service NGOs do not believe they are exempt from repression. To better understand how organizations' experiences of, and beliefs about, government harassment shape our findings, we supplement our main results with an exploratory text analysis of open-ended survey responses and in-depth interviews with NGOs that did not participate in our survey.

Exploratory text analysis and interviews confirm that service NGOs frequently experience harassment and suggest two likely explanations for this behavior. First, we find evidence that local officials request bribes from service NGOs in exchange for necessary approvals. This suggests that narrowing civic space may provide local authorities with greater latitude to extort NGOs for personal gain. Second, responses indicate that local officials target unfamiliar or relatively unestablished service NGOs to ensure that advocacy does not take place under the guise of development or service delivery. This suggests that local officials often see the threat posed by political advocacy as greater than the potential benefits from NGO service delivery. We call for future research that tests these hypotheses of government behavior toward service delivery NGOs using new data.

Our research design overcomes several obstacles impeding previous work on civil society. The NGO sector in most countries is highly fragmented, and data on NGO activities are scarce. Although cross-national data on legal restrictions and repression of NGOs have recently become available, isolating the effects of these practices on organizational behavior from country-level data would be difficult even if better data on NGO activities were available. These challenges are exacerbated by the co-occurrence of NGO repression with broader attacks on civil society and democratic institutions. Ours represents the first experimental study of the effects of closing civic spaces on NGO activities. The paper also demonstrates the utility of conjoint survey designs for shielding answers to highly sensitive questions (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). By creating multiple sources of variation in a forced choice context, conjoint designs can ameliorate concerns about the need for self-censorship in politically repressive environments. We encourage further use of this technique to answer pressing questions about the functioning of civil society.

Our paper is organized as follows. The second section presents a theory of how NGOs respond to government repression and how these responses will vary by sector. The third section describes the Cambodian context and the fourth and fifth sections introduce the design of our conjoint experiment and qualitative analysis and describe our data. The sixth section presents the aggregate results of harassment on NGO grant selection and the seventh section discusses how these results differ for NGOs operating in different sectors. Finally, the eighth section discusses exploratory analysis of open-ended survey questions and interviews. The ninth section concludes.

NGO Operations in Closing Civic Spaces

Although NGOs and governments sometimes work together in pursuit of important societal ends such as economic development and humanitarian relief, they frequently face conflicting incentives. Political incumbents often want NGOs to provide services but do not want them to engage in political advocacy that might mobilize communities against the government. For example, Boulding (2014) and Boulding and Gibson (2009) found that NGOs in Bolivia mobilized higher levels of voter turnout and political protest, and reduced the vote share of local incumbents. Furthermore, NGOs have been credited with sparking instances of popular mobilization ranging from local land disputes all the way to regional "color revolutions" (Gilbert and Mohseni 2018; Gilbert 2020). For these reasons, many governments want to curtail the politically costly work of advocacy NGOs, and incumbents with dubious democratic credentials have recently restricted NGOs in settings as diverse as Serbia, Uganda, and India.

In contrast, NGOs engaging in service delivery often fill gaps in government programs by providing services to underserved communities, which incumbents often encourage. Randomized evaluations of NGO service delivery interventions showing positive effects on health and education are common (Croke et al. 2016; Bold et al. 2018; Nyqvist et al. 2019; Tsai, Morse, and Blair 2020). For instance, Bhushan and Schwartz (2004) found that households in districts randomly assigned to receive health care from an NGO received better care than those assigned to the Cambodian government. Evidence suggests that provision of high-quality services by NGOs can result in political credit for both local and national political incumbents (Guiteras and Mobarak 2015; DiLorenzo 2018; Springman 2020,

2022). For these reasons, governments likely seek to avoid curtailing the politically valuable work of service delivery NGOs.

To discourage activism, regulations frequently require that NGOs maintain "political neutrality" and include intentionally vague language allowing for selective application of burdensome regulations (Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014; Salamon, Benevolenski, and Jakobson 2015; Brechenmacher 2017; Heiss 2017). These regulations provide government officials with enormous discretion, reduce the scope of NGO activities, and may even threaten the fiscal viability of many NGOs. Most developing-country NGOs rely on a constant stream of funding from competitively awarded grants from foreign donors tied to the execution of specific projects in specific locations (Salamon and Anheier 1996; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Bush 2015). In Cambodia, it is estimated that 85 percent of NGO funding comes from such grants (USAID 2017). While cross-national data on grant dependency are not available, evidence from diverse contexts suggests that this dependency is endemic in many poor countries (Absar et al. 2017; Brass et al. 2018; Pallas and Sidel 2020). Grant applications can be extremely labor-intensive, requiring many days and weeks of staff time. For this reason, NGOs must be strategic about the grants that they pursue. Failing to execute prespecified grant activities can lead to severe consequences, including the withdraw of future funding or an inability to secure future grants from a disappointed donor. See online appendix B for additional descriptive information on NGOs' grant application behavior.

Restrictive laws often target the ability of NGOs to execute grant activities by providing legal pretext for authorities to monitor, investigate, or even shut down NGO activities or detain their employees. We suggest that decisions about which grants to pursue are therefore a function of the perceived risk associated with different grants. In many countries, repressive policies are implemented primarily by local politicians, law enforcement, and bureaucrats. As a result, there is substantial variation in levels of repression across administrative units within countries (Kozlov, Libman, and Schultz 2018; Sullivan 2021). In response, NGOs have strong incentives to avoid interacting with government authorities known for more excessive harassment.

NGOs tend to focus on either political advocacy or service delivery and rarely engage in both types of activity. In their systematic review of the NGO literature spanning more than three decades, Brass et al. (2018, 143) found that NGOs are described as both providing services and engaging in advocacy in only 5 percent of articles. Our interviews and data in the eighth section confirm that this is also true in Cambodia. We argue that perceptions of the level of risk associated with the same location or the same authorities will be significantly more pronounced for advocacy NGOs than for service NGOs due to the nature of their activities. Given that their activities often challenge the interests of both national and local governments, advocacy NGOs have clear reason to believe that broadly written laws will be used by authorities to disrupt their activities. In times or places when the overall level of harassment by government is higher, advocacy NGOs should expect that they are more likely to be targeted than in times or places with lower levels of harassment.

Alternatively, service delivery NGOs should perceive a smaller increase in risk associated with increased harassment. If harassment is largely designed to prevent advocacy that may mobilize citizens against incumbent politicians or the regime as a whole, higher levels of repression should be targeted to interfere with advocacy NGOs but not service

providers. While the most blunt forms of repression, such as increased registration and reporting requirements, are likely to affect NGOs in all sectors (Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash 2016, 8; Heiss 2017), more discretionary forms of repression, such as shutting down NGO events or arresting NGO staff (which we term *harassment*), should rarely affect service NGOs. There are reasons service NGOs may expect occasional harassment. For example, if local authorities have difficulty distinguishing advocacy and service delivery NGOs, service NGOs may worry that they will be accidentally targeted. This may be especially likely when advocacy NGOs try to conceal their true sector from authorities.

Existing theories disagree on how vulnerable advocacy NGOs are to common forms of repression. Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2015, 429) and Chaudhry and Heiss (2019, 10) emphasize the potential for high-capacity advocacy NGOs to rebrand or "continue their programs by creatively working around regulations." Alternatively, Bush (2015, 43, 99) argues that the threat of eviction by national authorities motivates advocacy-focused international NGOs (INGOs) to pursue projects that incumbents find nonthreatening. Although their primary focus is how donor pressures shape the programming of INGOs, Bush (2015) presents evidence from case studies that INGOs pursue more "regime-compatible" programming in more repressive countries. Extending Bush's analysis, Heiss and Kelley (2017) provides evidence from cross-national data on grants issued by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) that INGOs pursue less confrontational programming in more repressive countries. Similarly, Teets (2014) provides qualitative evidence that government officials in China are able to facilitate and incorporate the activities of environmental NGOs that provide useful services or policy advice, while largely eliminating NGO activities that mobilize political opposition or challenge the regime's interests.

We expect that advocacy NGOs will see higher levels of harassment as posing a real risk to their projects and avoid operational decisions that increase those risks. Although branding their activities in less overtly political ways or skirting regulations may help advocacy NGOs avoid official sanctions by government agencies, the frequent involvement of local authorities in monitoring activities on the ground suggests that the detection of advocacy work is difficult to avoid (Teets 2014). Where local authorities enjoy a wide breach in applying vague legal provisions, such strategies are especially unlikely to succeed.

All hypotheses and analysis procedures were preregistered with the Evidence for Government and Politics (EGAP) Registry (ID: 20200421AB).[1] The pre-analysis plan (PAP) for this project included seven hypotheses. This paper focuses on the response of NGOs to government harassment and heterogeneity in this response by sector (H3 and H5). H1 specifies expectations about how grant values will affect NGOs' grant preferences and therefore provides a "sanity check." H2 expects that NGOs are mission driven and prefer work related to their core competencies and H4 expects that NGOs in repressive environments prefer donors that are more closely aligned with their government. H6 and H7 expect NGOs with more capacity and larger networks to be less sensitive to the effect of repression. We discuss these results briefly in the fourth and sixth sections. For a formal statement of all preregistered hypotheses, refer to online appendix C. For results, see online appendix G.

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[1] In the PAP, we use the terms Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and Non-Government Organization (NGOs) to refer to advocacy NGOs and service NGOs, respectively, and the term "monitoring and interference" to refer to harassment. This language was altered in the final paper to improve clarity.
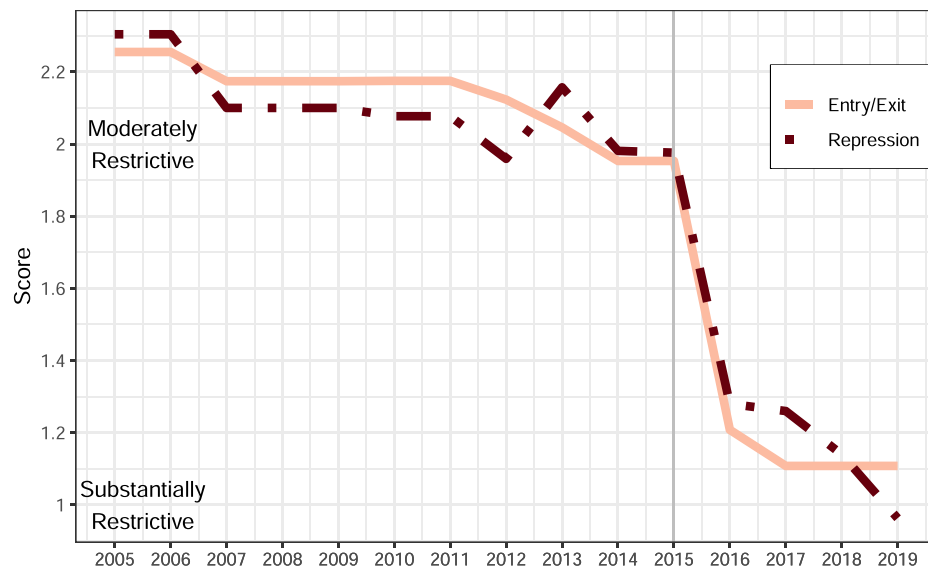
Figure 2. This figure plots the V-Dem Civil Society Organization (CSO) entry and exit (v2cseeorgs) and CSO repression (v2csreprss) variables for Cambodia from 2005 to 2019. The gray vertical line indicates the passage of the LANGO. Both variables are on a five-point scale (0–4) and indicate a decline from moderate (2) to substantial (1) presence of legal barriers to and repression of NGO operations. For the CSO entry and exit variable, a decrease from a score of two to a score of one includes the banning of CSOs from politics. For the CSO repression variable, a decrease from a score of two to a score of one includes the deployment of extralegal methods.

The Cambodian Context

Cambodia is an ideal environment to study the effects of government repression on NGO behavior. The ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has orchestrated significant democratic backsliding in recent years, culminating in the regime's banning of the main opposition party in advance of the 2018 elections. Reporting suggests that local authorities regularly search the offices of NGOs without cause, inconsistently enforce requirements to obtain permits for public demonstrations, deny permits selectively, shut down meetings, detain or arrest NGO staff and community representatives, and require them to sign promises to cease activities (U.S. Department of State 2019). Much of this increased harassment has found a legal basis in the 2015 Law on Associations and NGOs (LANGO) (Curley 2018), which met with widespread criticism from civil society and the international community. Among the concerns with LANGO is the vague requirement that all associations and organizations be "politically neutral."[2] One directive requiring that NGOs secure permission from local governments before conducting activities was eventually dropped, but the practice remains de facto law in many areas of the country (Dara 2017; Khorn 2019). Figure 2 uses V-Dem data to show that harassment of NGOs by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) intensified in the wake of this legislation.

While LANGO has resulted in burdensome registration requirements and invasive monitoring practices that affect all NGOs, anecdotally the brunt of harassment targets advocacy organizations (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights 2017). While NGOs engaged in the delivery of basic services are generally seen by the government as valuable development partners, those engaging in advocacy are viewed as opponents (Malena and Chhim 2009; Coventry 2016; International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2020). Interviews suggest that some service delivery NGOs believe that "trouble-making" by advocacy NGOs draws unnecessary government scrutiny to service delivery work. By contrast, interviews and practitioner accounts suggest that advocacy NGOs are often critical of service delivery NGOs for complying with local authorities' restrictions despite the dubious legal basis of the dictates (Malena and Chhim 2009).[3,4]

Like NGOs in many developing countries, Cambodian NGOs are heavily reliant on foreign funding and spend considerable effort applying for grants. Indeed, government authorities use this reliance of foreign funding to attack the legitimacy of NGOs and justify repression. According to the Civil Society Organization (CSO) Sustainability Index, 85 percent of NGO funding in Cambodia comes from foreign donors (USAID 2017), and according to a nationally representative survey of Cambodian NGOs conducted in 2011, 78 percent of 137 Cambodian NGOs received funding from at least one foreign source (Su´arez and Marshall 2014). NGOs that receive funding from donors critical of the CPP are especially vulnerable. Accusing NGOs of serving foreign interests has been a common tactic for the regime, and NGOs funded by the United States have been accused of participating in a "US interference network" (USAID 2017).

Our data, described further in the fifth, reinforce this point. Among our sample of 106 NGOs, only 41 percent of organizations reported receiving any non-grant sources of revenue in their last fiscal year, and 93 percent of total grant funding reported was from foreign sources. 82 percent of the NGOs in our sample received grant-based funding

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[2]LANGO also grants the Ministry of Interior the ability to deny or remove the registration of any organization or association "whose purpose and goals are found would endanger the security, stability and public order or jeopardize national security, national unity, culture, traditions, and customs of Cambodian national society."

[3]Interview with a high-level employee at Cambodian advocacy NGO 1, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 1, 2019.

[4]Interview with Cambodian development consultant 1, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 7, 2019.

directly from a foreign donor, and many of the remaining 18 percent likely received foreign funding indirectly through local organizations funded by foreign sources. The most common sources of funding were grants and subgrants from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Research Design

Factorial Discrete Choice Survey Experiment

To understand how government harassment shapes NGO behavior, we employ a factorial discrete choice survey experiment to identify the AMCE of common government harassment tactics on an NGO's decision to pursue a particular grant. As noted above, competitively awarded grants from foreign donors are the lifeblood of NGOs, and successful grant applications define what activities NGOs undertake and where they take place. Failing to execute grant activities can provoke the withdraw of funding or reduced access to future grants. For these reasons, NGOs must be strategic in how they allocate staff effort across labor-intensive grant applications that often take days or weeks to complete.

We present 176 survey respondents with a description of two hypothetical grants with randomly varied characteristics and ask them to indicate which grant their organization would be more likely to apply for. The grants vary on four dimensions: the value of the grant, the source of funding, the share of time spent on activities consistent with the NGO's core competencies, and the severity of government harassment in the locality where grant activities will take place. We ask respondents to complete five of these grant choice tasks, presenting each respondent with a total of ten hypothetical grants.

For each grant, we vary four attributes. The primary attribute of interest is the severity of government harassment in the district where grant activities will take place. We draw on newspaper articles, NGO reports, and expert interviews to select harassment tactics that are commonly used by district governors, police chiefs, and bureaucrats across Cambodia's 162 districts. We include a baseline category where respondents receive no information about government behavior in the district where grant activities are taking place, followed by attribute values that represent increasingly severe harassment. This includes requiring NGOs to seek permission before conducting any project activities, frequently shutting down project activities, and investigating or arresting NGO staff over concerns that project activities will disrupt public order or violate political neutrality. These four types or harassment are among the most frequently deployed forms of NGO repression in Cambodia.[5]

The survey experiment presented respondents first with a short prompt describing the grant choice task, followed by a description of each grant and a question asking about their preferences. The grant descriptions and question read as follows:

> Imagine that your NGO has the opportunity to apply for two grants. You have an equal chance of receiving both grants, and the applications require the same amount of effort to complete.
>
> Grant A (B) is [Source of funding] worth [Value of grant]. The grant activities would require your organi-

zation to spend [Time on competencies] of your time on activities related to your core competencies [Government harassment].

> If you could only apply for one of these grants, which grant would your organization be more likely to apply for? [Grant A; Grant B]

We also include three additional attributes used for shielding and magnitude comparisons, including the value of each grant, the source of funding, and the share of time spent on grant activities related to the NGOs' core competencies.[6] These attributes are salient characteristics of any grant NGOs might apply for, regardless of the NGO's sector or size. Grant values capture amounts that could be absorbed by small NGOs but would be worthwhile for large NGOs. The share of time spent on activities related to organizational competencies captures the extent to which a grant requires NGOs to invest in new skills or design new programs. Finally, we select donors that vary in their promotion of contentious advocacy work. While China is a close ally of the CPP with no appetite for advocacy (Strangio 2020), the CPP has repeatedly accused the United States of funding NGO efforts to stoke dissent. Finally, interviews with Cambodian NGOs suggest that Australia, the United Nations Development Program, and Oxfam fund some advocacy work but generally avoid conflict with the CPP.[7] Table 1 presents each grant attribute and the attribute's randomly selected values.

The conjoint design is well suited to our research question for three reasons. First, because the level of harassment associated with the location of each hypothetical grant's activities is assigned randomly, it is orthogonal to the characteristics of individual respondents and the organizations for which they work. As a result, we can obtain the effect of the level of harassment on the probability of a grant being chosen by the average respondent. Second, the conjoint analysis allows us to estimate the effect of harassment on an NGOs' decision to pursue a grant relative to other drivers of NGO's fundraising behavior, such as the grant's value or the nature of grant activities. Finally, because conjoints simultaneously vary multiple attributes of a hypothetical choice, they "shield" respondents from exposing how sensitive attribute values, such as government repression, affect their choice.

While the conjoint experimental design allows us to disentangle the effect of government harassment on NGOs' grant-seeking behavior, there are several limitations. First, despite evidence suggesting that stated preferences over hypothetical choices in conjoint experiments correspond with similar choices under real-world conditions (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015), a survey experiment necessarily simplifies the complex fundraising decisions faced by NGOs in shrinking civic spaces. To increase the realism of our experiment, we attempt to simulate the grant-writing process by providing respondents with details about grant characteristics that would typically be specified in a donor's call for applications (funding source, grant amount) or information that NGOs would be able to infer from these characteristics (the extent to which grant activities correspond with core competencies, the level of harassment in locations where grant activities will be implemented). Furthermore,

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[5] For specific examples of these modes of harassment, we refer readers to Annex 1 in the following report by a Cambodian human rights NGO, which contains a list of occurrences in 2015–2017 (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights 2017).

[6] We use the phrase "core competencies" because it is frequently used in capacity building interventions to indicate activities and objectives where NGOs have experience and capacity. Follow-up interviews suggest this phrase was interpreted as intended.

[7] Interview with a high-level employee at international advocacy NGO 1, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), June 8, 2020.

Table 1. Conjoint attributes and their possible values

Attribute	Values of attribute
Source of funding	• a United States Agency for International Development grant • an Australian Aid grant • an Oxfam grant • a China International Development Cooperation Agency grant • a United Nations Development Program grant
Value of grant	• 20,000 USD • 40,000 USD • 60,000 USD
Time on competencies	• 30 percent • 50 percent • 70 percent
Government harassment	• *no information* • and work in a district where authorities expect NGOs to seek permission before holding meetings, trainings, and other events • and work in a district where authorities frequently shut down NGO meetings, trainings, and other events • and work in a district where authorities have investigated NGO staff in recent years for alleged concerns about public order or violations of LANGO's political neutrality clause • and work in a district where authorities have arrested NGO staff in recent years for alleged concerns about public order or violations of LANGO's political neutrality clause

we argue that requiring respondents to decide which grant their NGO would be more likely to apply for resembles the choices NGOs must make when allocating their limited time and resources across labor-intensive grant applications.

Similarly, government harassment is a dynamic and powerful instrument of repression, the effects of which cannot be fully captured by the abstract nature of a survey experiment. To ensure that the features of the hypothetical grants closely resemble the nature of harassment experienced by Cambodian NGOs, we draw heavily on primary source documents and anecdotal accounts from Cambodian civil society (discussed above and in the third section). Finally, the conjoint analysis has limited utility for understanding how past experiences and beliefs inform conjoint choices. We integrate exploratory analysis of qualitative survey data and in-depth interviews to provide insights into the mechanisms driving our findings and generate new hypotheses for future research.

Open-Ended Response Analysis

We complement our conjoint experiment with quantitative and qualitative analysis of an open-ended question asking, "When organizations like [yours] work with the Royal Government of Cambodia, what are the biggest challenges?" This question is intended to capture information about the experiences of NGOs and their partners with government officials. To analyze responses quantitatively, we process the full text of each response by lemmatizing and tokenizing the words in each response and then dropping stop words and other common uninformative words.[8] We then divide our sample into NGOs focused on advocacy, services, and all other sectors (including NGO support, microfinance, and others) and calculated the frequency with which each word was used as well as the number of respondents that used each word. We also read through each response to inform our interpretation of the context and significance of frequently used words.

In-Depth Interviews

Finally, we draw on eleven in-depth interviews conducted with key informants between November 2019 and February 2021. Six of these interviews were conducted prior to data collection, two were conducted while data collection was ongoing, and three were conducted after the analysis of the conjoint was complete. Questions focused on each NGO's experiences with government, the experiences of their partner organizations, and the behavior of government toward civil society more generally. Because these interviews were conducted with individuals working for NGOs outside of our survey sample, they are intended to provide confirmation or dis-confirmation of hypotheses generated from analysis of our survey data. Interviews were conducted with two Cambodian intermediary support NGOs, three Cambodian advocacy NGOs, the Cambodia office of three international service delivery NGOs, and the Cambodia office of one international advocacy NGO.

Data

Our survey was embedded in a self-administered online Qualtrics survey of 176 employees from 106 Cambodian NGOs operating across the country in a variety of programmatic sectors. The survey was conducted from April through July of 2020 and served as the baseline for a randomized capacity building and financial diversification intervention, and respondents received $10 for their participation.[9] Questions were available in both English and Khmer. All registered NGOs in Cambodia were eligible to participate,[10]

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[8] For example, words that referred to the questions being asked, such as "challenge," "NGO," and "government" were extremely common, as were words such as "project," "authority," and "activity."

[9] In our emails recruiting NGOs to participate in the program and circulating our survey to individual respondents, we repeatedly emphasized that the selection of NGOs to receive the intervention would be entirely random and that responses to survey questions would not affect their chances of selection. Informing respondents in advance that treatment assignment would be randomized was meant to ensure that respondents were not incentivized to falsify or embellish responses in order to ensure their organization's participation in the intervention. Furthermore, the recruitment materials intentionally avoided references to sensitive civil society issues and focused on more traditional capacity-building subject matter, and questions asking about civic space and government behavior were placed at the end of the survey.

[10] Member-based organizations, local and INGOs, and foundations are all required to register with the Royal Government of Cambodia, as per the LANGO.

and invitations were distributed widely on social media and through established NGO newsletters and networking organizations. It is important to note that our respondents were not recruited from a random sample of the NGO population, and we cannot claim that our results generalize to the entire NGO community in Cambodia. However, randomization of treatments across respondents in our sample assures that our results capture the causal effect of each treatment on the responses of NGOs in our sample.

Moreover, as a testament to the breadth of recruitment efforts, our sample includes a diverse array of organizations that vary from small, local NGOs to large and well-resourced chapters of foreign NGOs. The sample includes NGOs based in sixteen of Cambodia's twenty-five provinces, with 60 percent of these organizations based in the capital, Phnom Penh (roughly reflecting the distribution of NGOs in the country). The median NGO in our sample has been active for sixteen years (oldest founded in 1978; youngest in 2019), has seventeen employees (max = 400; min = 4), has two office locations (max = 15; min = 1), and conducted programming in four provinces in 2019 (max = 14; min = 1). The median value of grants received by NGOs in our sample in their most recent fiscal year was $138,056 (max = $3,959,952; min = $5,000). Of 176 respondents, 120 reported their NGO's "primary focus" as service delivery ("delivering services directly to villages, households, or individuals"), 21 labeled their NGO's focus as advocacy, 17 reported a focus on supporting other NGOs, 10 reported being focused on social enterprise, 5 reported being focused on policy research, and 2 reported being a professional organization (see online appendix A for definitions). We distinguish advocacy and service delivery NGOs according to the activity they listed as the 'primary focus' of their organization. When comparing advocacy and service NGOs, we drop all other organizations. However, results are robust when comparing advocacy NGOs to all other NGOs.

Overall Results

Following Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley (2020), we present marginal means (MMs) and AMCEs for each outcome. MMs give the mean outcome across all appearances of a particular attribute value, averaging across all other features. The point of comparison for each estimate is 0.5, reflecting the 50 percent baseline probability of selection in a forced choice context. MMs above 0.5 indicate attribute values that increase the chance of selection and MMs below 0.5 indicate values that decrease the chance of selection. AMCEs give the estimated marginal effect of each attribute value on grant selection relative to a baseline category. AMCEs significantly greater than zero indicate attribute values that have a positive causal effect on grant selection, while AMCEs less than zero indicate attribute values that have a negative effect on grant selection.

The unit of analysis is the grant profile. Each of the 176 survey respondents were asked to indicate their preferred grant five times. Thus, the total sample size across all respondents is 1,760 (5 choices between two grant profiles by 176 respondents). When comparing advocacy to service NGOs in the seventh section, we lose 35 NGOs who qualify as neither; as a result, the total number of observations in the subgroup analysis is 1,410, comprising 1,200 observations from 120 service NGO employees and 210 observations from 21 advocacy NGO employees. Figure 7 in online

appendix D plots the frequency with which each feature choice appeared in the 1,760 hypothetical grant profiles. Because errors may be correlated not only across responses from the same respondent but also across responses from respondents employed by the same NGO, we cluster standard errors at the level of the NGO. Power calculations for conjoint experiments are the subject of several recent papers (Schuessler and Freitag 2014; Stefanelli and Lukac 2020), and our calculations show that we are powered to uncover even reasonably small main effects.[11] Standard diagnostics can be found in online appendix D.

We find strong evidence that government harassment affects NGO behavior. Requirements to work in a district with higher levels of harassment are associated with much lower rates of grant selection, and the effect of harassment on grant selection increases roughly linearly with the severity of harassment. Looking at both the MMs and the AMCEs in figure 3, an increase in the severity of harassment from the baseline category (no information) to the most severe category (arrest) has a similarly sized effect on grant selection as a decrease in the size of the grant from $60,000 to $20,000; that difference amounts to nearly 30 percent of the combined value of all grants received in the last fiscal year by the modal NGO in our sample.

Both the MMs and the AMCEs increase linearly with the amount of potential funding. Interestingly, NGOs are not more likely to select grants that allow them to dedicate a greater share of their time to their core competencies. Although contrary to our preregistered expectation, this corresponds with findings from Khieng and Dahles (2015) that survival pressures force many Cambodian NGOs to pursue grants outside of their mission. Also contrary to our preregistered expectation, NGOs report a strong aversion to grants funded by China's premiere development agency, the International Development Cooperation Agency (IDCA). This may reflect a lack of experience receiving funding from the Chinese government (no respondents reported receiving funding from the IDCA in the last fiscal year) or a wariness of China's close relationship with the CPP.

Comparing Results across Sectors

We find support for our preregistered expectation that advocacy NGOs are more sensitive than service NGOs to the threat of harassment. Looking at the MMs presented in figure 4, respondents from advocacy NGOs are significantly more likely than respondents from service delivery NGOs to select grants that contain no warning ("no information") about prior government harassment. Specifically, grant profiles with no warning about government harassment are 26 percent more likely to be selected by respondents that work for an advocacy NGO, but just 11 percent more likely to be chosen by respondents working for an NGO that focuses on service delivery. In other words, the increase in profile favorability for grant profiles that do not contain a warning about government harassment is 58 percent larger for advocacy NGOs. Looking at AMCEs that take the "no information" attribute value as the comparison category, we see that the effect of each harassment tactic has a stronger effect on grant selection by advocacy NGOs. Although a nested model comparison between models with

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While there have been reports that some member-based organizations have struggled to register, registration is ubiquitous among NGOs in Cambodia. As of 2017, there were around 6,000 registered associations and NGOs in the country (USAID 2017).

[11] Power calculations demonstrate that with this sample size and clustering, we should be able to determine an effect size of at least a 0.08 change in the AMCE, if we assume that each respondent was exposed to all five forms of NGO harassment at least once and an intracluster correlation of 0.5. If we assume that respondents were only exposed to one of the five forms of harassment, the minimum detectable effect is a 0.18 change in the AMCE.

Figure 3. MMs (left panel) and AMCE estimates (right panel) for the full sample of respondents. For MMs, points to the left of the gray line indicate that an attribute made respondents less likely to select a grant (on average). For AMCEs, points to the left of the gray line indicate a negative causal effect of the attribute on grant selection relative to the baseline category (on average).

and without interactions and between the subgroup indicator and all attribute values is not significant (likely because the estimation is weakly powered), the theoretically specified pattern is visually apparent. Preferences over other attribute values are nearly identical among respondents from advocacy and service NGOs.

While these subgroup effects are substantively large and statistically significant in our main specification, the strength of these inferences is limited by the relatively small number of respondents from advocacy NGOs in our sample. Figure 7 in online appendix D plots the frequency with which each feature choice appeared in the 210 hypothetical grant profiles seen by respondents from advocacy NGOs.

Furthermore, in online appendix H.2, we show that these effects are not robust to an alternative measure of grant preferences that was not preregistered, although we provide several reasons to believe the results from this alternative measure are less reliable.

This pattern is further supported by descriptive data collected in the survey. We asked respondents to identify the challenges that inhibit the ability of their NGO to fulfill its mission. Those working for advocacy NGOs were consistently more likely than those working for service delivery NGOs to select harassment or direct attacks on the NGO sector (24 versus 8 percent), a restrictive or politicized legal environment (57 versus 32 percent), and restrictions
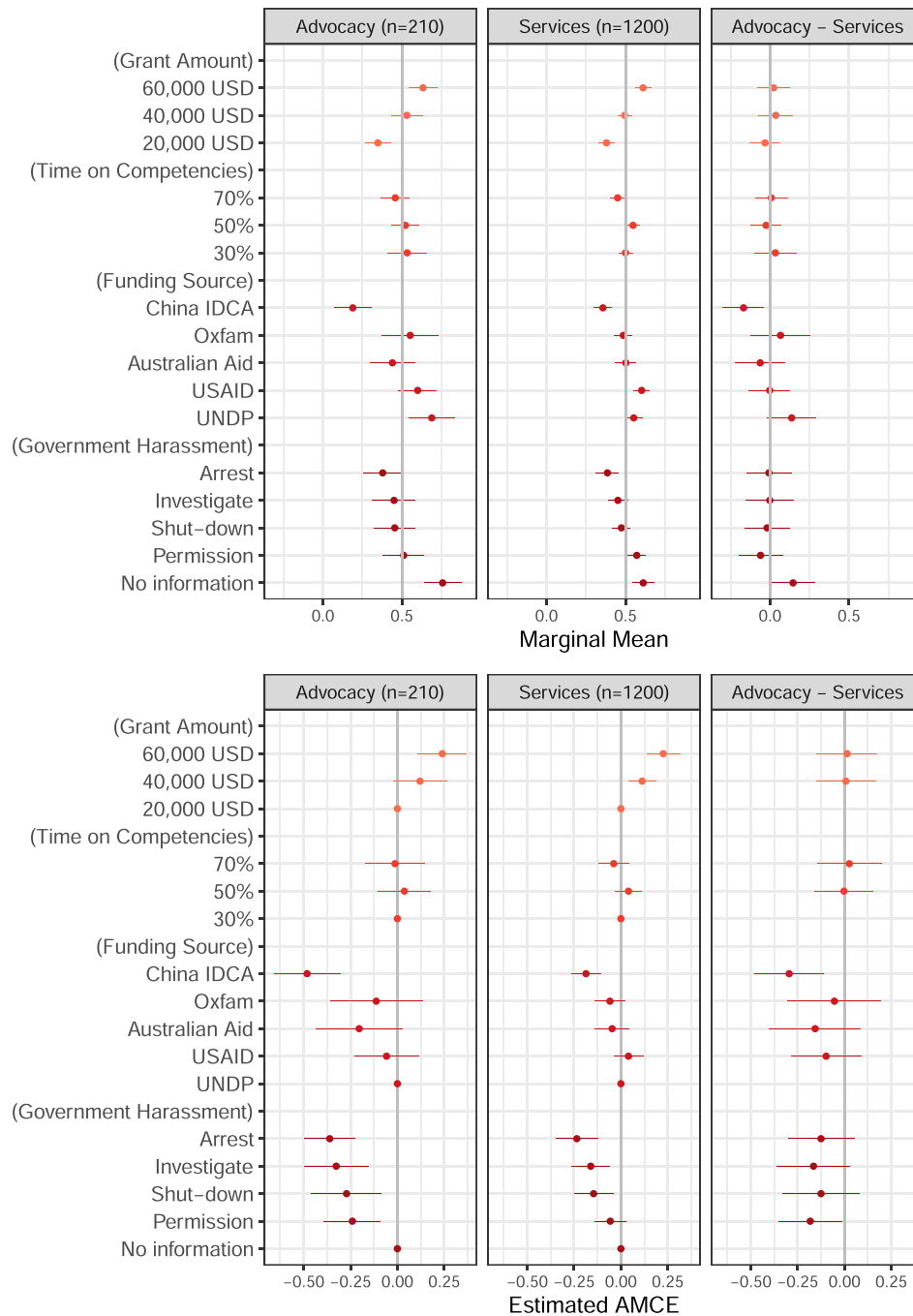
Figure 4. MMs (top panel) and AMCE estimates (bottom panel) for the effect of government harassment across advocacy (first panel), service delivery (second panel), and the difference between them (third panel). For MMs, points to the left of the gray line indicate that an attribute made respondents less likely to select a grant (on average). For AMCEs, points to the left of the gray line indicate a negative causal effect of the attribute on grant selection relative to the baseline category (on average). Our theory expects that the difference between advocacy and service NGOs will be negative, indicating that points in the third panel should be to the left of the gray line.

on the types of speech or activities NGOs can engage in (38 versus 22 percent). We also see evidence that advocacy NGOs have a significantly stronger aversion to grants from the Chinese government, which is associated with a repressive stance toward civil society and a close relationship with the CPP. In fact, the negative AMCE for Chinese funding is more than twice as large for advocacy NGOs relative to service delivery NGOs and is the single largest effect of any attribute value. Interviews confirmed that a small number of Cambodian NGOs do receive funding from China

for projects related to climate change adaptation and aquaculture; however, these efforts are likely in coordination with the Cambodian government, and that the recent emergence of this practice has raised concerns among advocacy organizations.[12,13]

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[12] Interview with a high-level employee at international service delivery NGO 3, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), February 1, 2021.

[13] Interview with a high-level employee at international service delivery NGO 2, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), February 2, 2021.

Despite the far larger concern about harassment among advocacy NGOs, we still see that the threat of repression has a strong deterrent effect on service delivery NGOs. In fact, the AMCE for shifting from the baseline no information attribute to the most severe harassment attribute is almost identical to the AMCE for a decrease in the size of the grant from $60,000 to $20,000. The median income from grants for service NGOs in our sample in 2019 was $127,187. This suggests that even service NGOs, who ostensibly advance the interests of incumbents by providing valuable public services, report a willingness to forego 31 percent of their annual income from grants to avoid operating in districts with high levels of harassment. Furthermore, the descriptive statistics in the last paragraph demonstrate that many NGOs that focus on service delivery still see government harassment and restrictions as a formidable obstacle to their work.

Also contrary to our preregistered expectations, we do not find evidence that higher capacity NGOs or NGOs with more extensive networks have systematically different preferences on any of these grant attribute values. Figures presenting subgroup effects and balance (regressing subgroup indicators on attribute values) are available in online appendix G.

Explaining the Impact on Service Delivery NGOs

Why does the increased incidence of harassment affect the operational decisions of service delivery NGOs? Service NGOs are reportedly seen by the government as partners and are often included by government in discussions and planning around development (Malena and Chhim 2009; Coventry 2016). Furthermore, there is a widespread belief, even among service delivery NGOs, that the services NGOs provide are a valuable source of political legitimacy for the incumbent regime.[14,15] In this section, we conduct exploratory analysis of open-ended survey questions and in-depth interviews with NGOs outside of our survey sample to identify potential explanations for this behavior.

We find clear evidence that both service and advocacy NGOs are subject to harassment by local officials and that this harassment is justified by concerns about political activity. However, this harassment occurs for different reasons and is less severe for service NGOs. Our analysis suggests two hypotheses for future investigation. First, increased regulation of activities provides local officials with opportunities for rent-seeking. The ability to cite concerns about political activities to justify the disruption of NGO activities likely provides bureaucratic gatekeepers with a source of leverage to secure bribes. Second, local officials use harassment to police the line between service delivery and advocacy. Specifically, local officials only harass service NGOs that have not established a track record of apolitical behavior. Although we are unable to test the first hypothesis, we are able to examine one observable implication of this second hypothesis using results from the conjoint experiment. Figure 5 presents the most frequently used words when answering a question about the challenges of working with government. The most frequently mentioned words relate to government inefficiencies and shortcomings. Service delivery NGOs frequently mention "bureaucracy," "fund," and "implementation" (usually referencing the unwillingness of of-

ficials to provide funds or assist with implementation), advocacy NGOs mention "report" and "law" (referencing excessive reporting and legal requirements), and other NGOs mention "follow" and "require" (also referencing difficult reporting requirements). Despite these differences across sectors, we find that political concerns are pervasive. Among the full sample of 176 responses from 106 NGOs, "politics" or "political" is the third most frequently mentioned word. Dividing the sample into advocacy, service delivery, and all other NGOs, politics is the fourth most frequently mentioned word for each group. Furthermore, 10 percent of respondents from advocacy NGOs mentioned the word "politics" or "political" at least once, while 8 percent of service delivery NGO respondents mentioned politics at least once.

Further analysis suggests that political concerns motivate harassment by government officials. One employee working in the Cambodian office of a large international advocacy NGO outside of our sample reported that although service delivery NGOs are "generally less pressured than advocacy NGOs," they have been experiencing "increasing pressure from the government."[16] Another working for a Cambodian advocacy NGO outside of our sample reported that some service delivery NGOs believe that "trouble-making" by advocacy NGOs draws unnecessary government scrutiny to service delivery work.[17] Within our survey sample, three service delivery and two advocacy NGOs mentioned problems with local "law enforcement" as the biggest challenge of working with government. These concerns were not limited to advocacy and service delivery NGOs. A respondent from a microfinance NGO stated that the biggest challenge to working with the government was "political partisanship and self-interest" among officials. Similarly, a respondent from a social enterprise focused NGO reported that political dynamics with local authorities can make it "hard to bring beneficiaries for training."

What accounts for the frequency with which NGOs working outside of the advocacy sector encounter politically motivated harassment? One potential explanation is that NGOs in our sample engage in both advocacy and service activities. However, interviews with NGOs outside of our sample suggest that very few NGOs in Cambodia conduct both advocacy and service activities.[18] Furthermore, of the 120 respondents in our sample that identified their NGO as primarily focused on service delivery, only 24 percent listed advocacy as a secondary area of activity. When we compare the effect of harassment in the conjoint experiment between service NGOs that do and do not report advocacy as a secondary area of activity, we find that "pure" service delivery NGOs are not less sensitive to harassment than those engaged in some advocacy work (see online appendix E), suggesting that these potential differences are not the cause of government harassment of service NGOs. Consequently, it is unlikely that the harassment results from working in multiple sectors simultaneously. Our interviews, however, point to two more plausible explanations.

First, we find some evidence that closing civic spaces offers local officials with opportunities for corruption. LANGO provided local authorities with extremely wide discretion in their monitoring of NGO activities and enforcement of requirements for political neutrality. These officials

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[14] Interview with a high-level employee at international service delivery NGO 2, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), February 2, 2021.

[15] Interview with employees at Cambodian advocacy NGO 2, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), February 25, 2021.

[16] Interview with a high-level employee at international advocacy NGO 1, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), June 18, 2020.

[17] Interview with a high-level employee at Cambodian advocacy NGO 1, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 1, 2019.

[18] Interview with a high-level employee at international service delivery NGO 3, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), February 1, 2021.

Figure 5. Word clouds plotting the most frequently mentioned words for the (1) full sample of all NGOs, and dividing the sample by (2) advocacy, (3) service delivery, and (4) all other NGOs (including support NGOs, microfinance, and others). Word frequencies are calculated after lemmatizing each word and dropping stop words and other common uninformative words.

may accuse service delivery NGOs of political activities in an attempt to extort bribes in exchange for granting necessary project approvals. While only five NGOs in our sample explicitly mentioned the word "corruption" in their discussion of the biggest challenges to working with government, respondents frequently complained that local officials request side payments in exchange for cooperation. For example, one respondent, who did not use the word corruption, complained that their NGO is forced to "pay for the services or signatures of every official involved," while another stated that officials are focused on "monetary gains as exchanges for attending in meeting/events." Similarly, respondents from two service delivery NGOs mentioned an inability to pay high per-diems requested by government staff as a prerequisite to cooperation. Interviews confirm that requests for bribes are common, supporting the claim that political accusations may be used as leverage.[19]

Second, our exploratory analysis yields substantial evidence that local officials use harassment to police the line between service delivery and advocacy. Specifically, harassment of service NGOs is concentrated among NGOs that have not established trust with local officials or central government ministries. In open-ended responses, there were

frequent references to local authorities' concerns about the true intentions of service NGOs. One employee working for a service delivery NGO reported that local authorities often "hesitated to cooperate" and operate as a "watchdog on the activities of [NGOs] that working with the local populations." Another said that despite being a nonpolitical organization, local authorities were often concerned that their activities might cause a "color revolution and demonstration from the people against the government." Another reported resistance because local officials "thought that we worked for opposite party," while another described the need to "gain more trust from Government that we are not political party." One employee from an NGO focused on supporting other NGOs (intermediary support organization) suggested that because of the "political situation," local authorities often had "misconceptions of the parties involved and demanded much explanation," while another expressed concerns about "being perceived as the enemy or aligned with the forbidden opposition."

In-depth interviews provide additional support for this explanation drawn from NGOs outside our sample. One key informant working in the Cambodia office of a large international service delivery NGO described their organization's experience working directly with government and the experiences of the many local NGOs that implement their projects on the ground. They argued that success in

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[19] Interview with a high-level employee at international service delivery NGO 3, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), February 1, 2021.
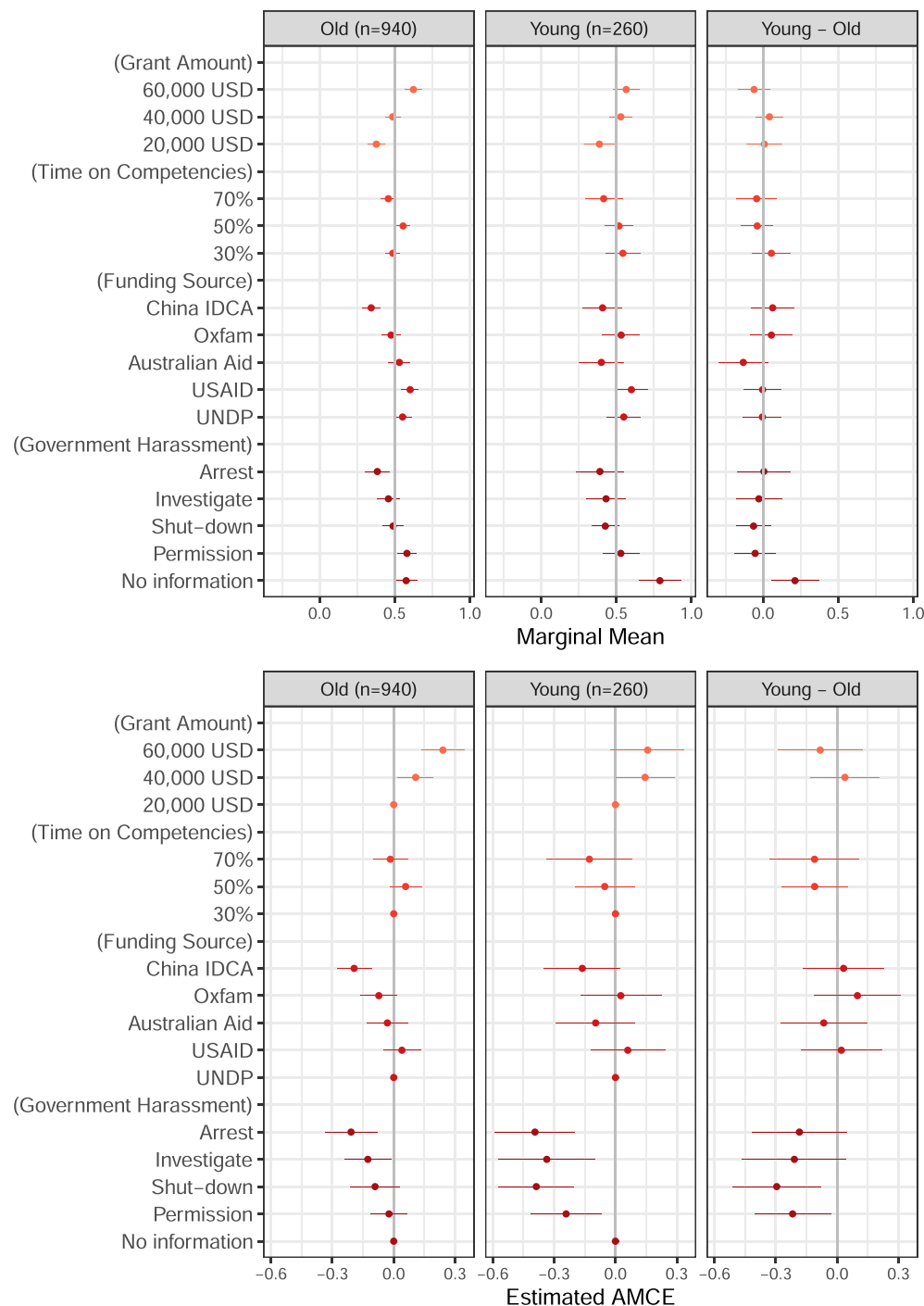
Figure 6. MMs (top panel) and AMCE estimates (bottom panel) for the effect of government harassment on service NGOs across NGOs founded more than ten years ago (first panel), less than ten years ago (second panel), and the difference between them (third panel). For MMs, points to the left of the gray line indicate that an attribute made respondents less likely to select a grant (on average).

working with both national government ministries and local government officials hinges on trust. In fact, they reported that helping local NGOs build trust with government is a core part of building their capacity. According to this individual, many in government "believe that all civil society is biased towards the opposition, so everyone seems like opposition," and even large INGOs can have trouble getting approval to engage with local NGOs when these local NGOs are not already trusted. This extreme distrust of NGOs leads to the disruption of service delivery work despite the belief

of government that NGO service provision yields political benefits for the incumbent regime.[20] Another key informant working in the Cambodia office of a large international advocacy NGO described the relationship between NGOs and government as "extremely distrustful." They linked the increasing tension to the former dominant opposition party's surprising electoral performance in the 2013 elections and

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[20] Interview with a high-level employee at international service delivery NGO 2, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), February 2, 2021.

a belief among many in government that NGOs are "inherently political."[21]

These conjectures generate a testable implication. If repeated interactions with government officials help to establish trust, we should see that older service NGOs should be less sensitive to harassment than newly established operations. To test this expectation, we compare the effect of harassment in the conjoint experiment between service NGOs that were founded more than ten years ago to those founded within the past decade. This hypothesis was not preregistered and is also exploratory, but it provides compelling evidence for the trust mechanism. Figure 6 shows that the effect of harassment on grant choice is significantly stronger among younger NGOs. The MM for the "no information" category is almost 33 percent larger for NGOs founded less than 10 years ago, and the AMCE is larger for each attribute value.

For AMCEs, points to the left of the gray line indicate a negative causal effect of the attribute on grant selection relative to the baseline category (on average). Importantly, we do not see this differential effect of harassment by age among advocacy NGOs (see online appendix F), and the median advocacy NGO in our sample is three years older than the median service NGO (19 and 16, respectively), suggesting that differences in age do not account for the heightened sensitivity of advocacy NGOs to harassment reported in the seventh section. Furthermore, we do not see this relationship across NGOs that are more or less professional or that are larger or smaller, suggesting that age is not proxying for characteristics related to capacity (see online appendix G.1).[22] These results suggest that even in contexts with high levels of harassment, older service NGOs believe they are unlikely to be targeted by government officials. This exploratory test provides compelling evidence that service NGOs are targeted for harassment only when government officials are uncertain about their activities, rather than because NGO service provision is seen as threatening government interests. Furthermore, this explanation for harassment of service NGOs confirms our original argument that harassment is designed to prevent advocacy but draws attention to the importance of information for governments to target repression effectively.

Conclusion

Civil society can be a potent force for political change. In response, governments around the world have started to constrict civic space by repressing organizations involved in political advocacy. However, we understand very little about how governments target repression, how NGOs navigate their operations in closing civic spaces, and how these responses vary by NGO sector. We find clear evidence that the threat of repression by government authorities has a large effect on the fiscal viability and operational decision-making of NGOs, and that this produces a chilling effect on NGO activity at the local level. Consistent with our expectations, we also see suggestive evidence that increases in the perceived prevalence of harassment has a stronger deterrent effect for advocacy NGOs than those focused on services. However,

we also find evidence that increases in harassment have a substantively large effect on the behavior of service delivery NGOs.

Drawing on responses to open-ended questions and interviews, we find that both service and advocacy NGOs are subject to harassment by local officials, and that this harassment is justified by concerns about political activity. This is surprising, given substantial empirical evidence and the belief among many practitioners that NGO service delivery yields political credit for incumbents. We, therefore, conduct an exploratory analysis of our qualitative data to identify potential explanations for this finding. First, we find some evidence that the authority to enforce regulations on NGO activities provides opportunities for local officials to solicit bribes. This outcome is likely the result of a principal–agent problem in which local officials abuse the central government's reliance on them as an enforcer of NGO regulations at the community-level. Second, we find substantial evidence that local officials harass service NGOs until they can verify their avoidance of political activities. This analysis also suggests that many service NGOs are able to establish trust with government officials, allowing them to operate without fear of political harassment. The same is not true for advocacy NGOs. We call for future research to test these novel hypotheses using new data.

This paper provides important evidence that common forms of government repression are effective at minimizing political advocacy, but that repression is likely accompanied by reductions in non-state service delivery. In fact, our exploratory analysis suggests that the threat of political advocacy by NGOs is seen as so grave that government officials in Cambodia restrict NGO service delivery to ensure that advocacy does not take place under the guise of development. We conclude that while NGOs in all sectors experience harassment, the intent of government officials, the intensity of harassment, and the perceived risk of contact with repressive authorities varies according to the sector in which NGOs operate. Importantly, lack of trust limits the ability of political incumbents to pursue their ideal strategy of impeding advocacy while encouraging service delivery.

These findings highlight the importance of accounting for NGO sector in both theoretical and empirical analyses and suggest that service-oriented NGOs are more sensitive to government harassment than some previous work has imagined. We argue that future studies should utilize conjoint survey experiments to probe the experience of NGOs in closing civic spaces, the strategies used by NGOs to navigate restrictive environments, and how these experiences and strategies vary by sector. We also call for further research into the ways that governments target repression of NGOs. New subnational data on where and when NGOs are targeted with harassment are needed to advance our understanding of how governments internalize trade-offs associated with repression. Such analysis could also contribute to a broader literature on when governments prioritize service provision and economic development over stifling dissent.

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[21] Interview with a high-level employee at international advocacy NGO 1, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (remote), June 18, 2020.

[22] If government sees some service NGOs as trustworthy and others as untrustworthy, these results could be a function of survivor bias if service NGOs that cannot gain trust are shut down and only trustworthy service NGOs survive. However, we see this explanation as unlikely, as all NGOs that truly focus on service delivery should be capable of gaining trust by demonstrating a sustained commitment to service delivery over time.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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