

# International Development NGOs and Bureaucratic Capacity: Facilitator or Destroyer?

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## Abstract

Do development international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) facilitate or destroy the bureaucratic capacity of the states in which they operate? The literature is split on this question. Some scholars argue that development INGOs weaken state capacity by delivering social services that the government is supposed to provide. Others argue that by increasing a country's domestic demand for improved human rights, development INGOs improve a government's capacity to fulfill them. In this paper, we show that the effect of development INGOs on state capacity depends on whether a state is democratic or nondemocratic. In our cross-sectional time-series analysis, we find that development INGO presence has a significant positive relationship with state capacity in democracies but no relationship with state capacity in nondemocratic states. These findings help explain the inconsistent claims in the existing INGO literature and are also relevant for development INGOs and the policymakers that support them.

## Keywords

INGO, civil society, state capacity, bureaucratic capacity, regime type

## Introduction

How does the presence of development international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), like Oxfam or CARE International, influence bureaucratic capacity in the countries where they operate?<sup>1</sup> Development INGOs engage in both service delivery—providing social services, like nutrition or sanitation services, in the developing world—and advocate for governments to provide improved social services to their own populations (Union of International Associations [UIA] 2013/2014; Uvin 2007). Bureaucratic capacity is defined as the quality and consistency of a state's delivery of goods and services (International Country Risk Guide [ICRG] 2012). Development INGOs aim to substitute for weak bureaucratic capacity by providing social services themselves *and* strengthen bureaucratic capacity by working with governments and advocating for the improvement of their social services (Fowler 1991; Oxfam International 2015; Uvin 2007). In reality, how do development INGOs influence state bureaucratic capacity?<sup>2</sup> Does their involvement actually contribute to these dual, bottom-up and top-down, poverty alleviation aims?

Although early literature on development INGOs considered them the “magic bullet” for community-based development, many practitioner and scholarly critiques argue that development INGOs, in fact, undermine long-term

community development by reducing state capacity to deliver social services (Eil 2008; Kalb 2006; Karajkov 2007). According to this critique, by providing services in lieu of the state, development INGOs relieve the state of popular pressure for the bureaucratic capacity necessary to deliver social services (Bodea and LeBas 2016; Bratton 1989; Eil 2008; Kalb 2006; Karajkov 2007).

The literature on INGO advocacy, for its part, argues that advocacy by development INGOs may strengthen bureaucratic capacity and improve state-society relations (Keck and Sikkink 1999; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). The literature on Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) finds that INGO advocacy can encourage domestic civil society actors to demand that their governments respect human rights, including economic, social, and cultural rights (Keck and Sikkink 1999; United Nations General Assembly 1986). These INGO-civil society linkages can, in turn, enable the emergence of larger domestic and international social movements and, in certain

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situations, lead to actual reductions in the levels of human rights abuses by government actors (Hendrix and Wong 2013; Keck and Sikkink 1999; Murdie 2014). Better human rights practices by states are, in turn, associated with improvements in state capacity (Englehart 2009). In addition, scholarship on the role of advocacy in the rights-based approach to development argues that INGO advocacy and direct cooperation with governments will lead to increased bureaucratic capacity in response to increased citizen demand (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Jonsson 2003; Uvin 2004, 2007). In sum, instead of substituting for the state, the literature on INGO advocacy would contend that INGOs often complement the state's bureaucratic capacity.

These two arguments concerning the relationship between development INGOs and bureaucratic capacity are diametrically opposed. Are development INGOs substitutes or complements for the state? Does their presence harm state capacity or do development INGOs actually enable a well-functioning state? While existing arguments identify the potential disparate effects of development INGOs on bureaucratic capacity, extant literature fails to examine the conditions under which these INGOs may contribute to divergent outcomes. We contend this is due to the omission of a critical conditioning factor: the regime type of the state where the development INGO is operating. While the literature on the relationship between international aid and economic development has identified the crucial conditioning role of regime type, the literature on INGOs has largely ignored the role of regime type and the ways in which regime type can condition the effect of INGOs on bureaucratic capacity. We argue that regime type moderates the relationship between development INGOs and bureaucratic capacity and that it is the critical missing element in disentangling divergent arguments of whether development INGOs help or harm a state's bureaucratic capacity. In democratic regimes, development INGOs are able to aid in the development of bureaucratic capacity. In nondemocratic regimes, development INGOs are not.

There are two interrelated causal mechanisms that help explain the long-term positive effects of development INGOs on bureaucratic capacity in democratic regimes. First, development INGOs can increase popular demand for effective goods and services from the state. By buttressing the service delivery capacity of the state, development INGOs can demonstrate the value of improved service delivery, helping to increase popular demand. In addition, these same development INGOs advocate directly with the population, domestic civil society, and government representatives for the fulfillment of the population's right to development. These advocacy efforts can also encourage increased popular demand for effective goods and services from the state.

As outlined in selectorate theory, democratic regimes are incentivized to respond to the demands of the broader population (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011), making them more likely than nondemocratic regimes to respond to this popular pressure by increasing the state's bureaucratic capacity and related service-delivery capacity (Kosack 2003, 13; Rodrik 1999). Autocratic states, on the other hand, tend to respond to the interests of a narrow group of elites rather than the broader population, making them less likely than democratic states to respond positively to population demands for increasing bureaucratic capacity (Kosack 2003; Lake and Baum 2001).

Second, development INGOs and democratic regimes are more likely to cooperate directly because they share a commitment to political pluralism and respect for the population's rights (Bratton 1989). Democratic regimes are more likely than nondemocratic regimes to embrace and permit development INGOs' right-based focus and related advocacy efforts (Bush 2015). Nondemocratic regimes may still work with INGOs when they support their goals and the desires of their selectorate (Teets 2014) but may be more restrictive in what they allow INGOs to do within their borders (Carothers and Brenchenmacher 2014; Cooley 2015; Hayman 2016). Furthermore, development INGOs are likely to be more comfortable collaborating directly with democratic regimes than with nondemocratic regimes, for fear of legitimizing their "unjust social order" (Bratton 1989, 584). By working directly with the state to deliver goods and services, development INGOs can, thus, reinforce democratic states' bureaucratic capacity.

As such, our argument and findings support the existing literature's assertion that development INGOs can play an important role in supporting the claims of domestic civil society, which we theorize is due to a new causal mechanism through which development INGOs bolster bureaucratic capacity—directly collaborating with the state to implement development projects—in addition to direct or indirect advocacy for changes in state bureaucratic capacity. These mechanisms are dependent, however, on the regime type of the state where the INGO is working.

Using a cross-sectional-time-series analysis of the short- and long-term effects of development INGO presence on bureaucratic capacity in developing countries (non-Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD]), we find that the positive relationship between development INGOs and bureaucratic capacity is largely confined to democratic regimes. Our results indicate that an equivalent presence of development INGOs in nondemocracies has no meaningful effect on bureaucratic capacity over the short- or long-term. Our results are robust even after the inclusion of a number of potentially confounding variables, including the historical legacy of states and levels of international aid. We also show that

our findings are not likely a product of greater resource allocation by development INGOs in democratic states or differences in the number of development INGOs operating in democracies versus nondemocracies.

The results presented here have potentially important policy significance. Unlike alarmist accounts of development INGOs undermining the state, we show that development INGOs can be beneficial to bureaucratic capacity. Even in nondemocracies, our findings show that their presence does not reduce bureaucratic capacity. These findings should be reassuring to the growing community of civil society actors, donors, and international organizations that work with development INGOs.

## Bureaucratic Capacity and INGOs

### *Determinants of Bureaucratic Capacity*

Bureaucratic capacity describes the ability of the state to deliver health, education, water and sanitation, and infrastructure services, which are the same services that development INGOs aim to improve. Bureaucratic capacity is also central to the debate in the literature about the effect of development INGOs on state capacity. If development INGOs substitute for a state by delivering services over an extended period of time, they could undermine the state's bureaucratic capacity (Ell 2008; Kalb 2006; Karajkov 2007). Conversely, if advocacy efforts and partnerships with states lead to INGOs augmenting or complementing the state's capacity to deliver services over an extended period of time, they could strengthen the state's bureaucratic capacity over time.

Although competing arguments about the relationship between INGOs and bureaucratic capacity are frequent in the existing INGO scholarly and practitioner literature, the extant literature on bureaucratic capacity has not explicitly examined the role of INGOs. Instead, it has focused on domestic factors that influence the state's tax-based revenue collection, the legal origins of the state, international trade, and dependency on foreign aid (Besley and Persson 2009; Busse and Gröning 2009; La Porta et al. 1999; Moss, Pettersson, and van de Walle 2006; Savoia and Sen 2014). Scholars argue that legal systems grounded in English common law are more likely to have greater separation between the judicial and legislative institutions and, thus, thanks to the lack of political interference, a higher degree of protection of property rights and more capable bureaucracies (La Porta et al. 1999; Savoia and Sen 2014). In addition, countries that are more dependent on foreign aid may have weaker bureaucratic capacity because the elite are not incentivized to respond to the preferences of their population but rather to the interests of donors (Busse and Gröning 2009; Savoia and Sen 2014).

Aid can have a similar negative effect as natural resources, like oil or mineral wealth, may have on state capacity. When the government has a high degree of resources flowing to it from natural resources or international aid, it has fewer demands from its population to deliver quality goods and services in return for tax revenue (Moss, Pettersson, and van de Walle 2006). Trade, on the contrary, is thought to have a positive effect on economic development and state capacity, mainly by increasing demand for services provided by the state as wealth accumulates (Besley and Persson 2009).

On the influence of regime type on bureaucratic capacity, many scholars argue that democratic regimes are more likely to have strong bureaucratic capacity because they are incentivized to respond to the evolving needs of their population (Besley and Persson 2009). Other scholars disagree, contending that authoritarian governments such as Taiwan and South Korea were able to prioritize economic development above other concerns of the population, rapidly increasing their bureaucratic capacity (Savoia and Sen 2014, 14).

The literature reviewed above points to several potential factors associated with increased bureaucratic capacity. Existing scholarship in this area, however, provides few direct clues as to the potential effect of INGOs on bureaucratic capacity. Below, we expand on the ways in which INGOs could influence state capacity, focusing on the mechanisms through which INGOs could conditionally influence domestic demands for goods and services and the state's ability to respond to these demands.

### *Effect of INGO Presence on Bureaucratic Capacity*

At the most basic level, an INGO is defined by its separation from the state; it is, by its very name, "nongovernmental." What, then, is the relationship of INGOs to the states in which they operate? For development INGOs, in particular, multiple accounts have argued that they undermine bureaucratic capacity, particularly when the state is already fragile, like after a humanitarian disaster (Zanotti 2010). Rather than bolstering the state, these INGOs become potential competitors of the state, drawing away scarce donor resources (Cooley and Ron 2002; Coyne 2013; Terry 2002). According to this logic, states do not have to be responsive to citizen demands for public services (and the bureaucratic capacity that often accompanies these services) when INGOs are providing these services. Like aid dollars or natural resource wealth, INGOs are seen as limiting bureaucratic capacity because they separate the state from citizen demand.

This view of development INGOs as destructive to bureaucratic capacity seems to contradict the vision of

INGOs that emerged in the early 1990s. With the beginning of the rapid rise in INGOs, policymakers and scholars expressed their hope that INGOs would address developing countries' most trenchant problems (Fowler 1991; Reimann 2006). By working directly with the poorest people, INGOs would be the cornerstone of community-based development and recovery, building bureaucratic capacity from the bottom up (Fowler 1991). At the same time, INGOs aimed to influence the top-down behavior of the state by strengthening domestic civil society organizations and advocating for the protection of human rights (Clark 1992; Uvin 2004).

Accounts of development INGO advocacy efforts support this positive view. Many development INGOs have contributed to the emergence of TANs that promote human rights and other international norms via tight linkages between local civil society actors and transnational groups (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1999). In fact, much of the general INGO scholarship has focused on development and other INGOs' crucial role in norm emergence, as the representatives of the "people" within the institutions of global governance (Gulbrandsen and Andresen 2004; Raustiala 1997). According to this logic, INGOs would contribute to improved bureaucratic capacity by helping citizens organize and demand goods and services from their governments. INGOs would also help spread international norms about good governance, including what goods and services one should expect from a government.

Along these lines, recent policy literature within the INGO community posits several ways that INGOs could engage with the state to improve bureaucratic capacity, including through direct cooperation with local government officials and advocacy for policy changes with the central government (Care International 2014; Hughes 2012; Mercy Corps 2015).<sup>3</sup> For example, the Advocacy Handbook for Care International states,

Part of our role as CARE is to facilitate or build bridges between people living in poverty and "formal" institutions (e.g. local authorities and national government, parliaments, donors). The role of being a convener is, in fact, a central one for promoting dialogue resulting in pro-poor policies. (Care International 2014, 1)

The importance of bridging state-society relations has become a core approach promoted by INGOs and their donors, as indicated in a recent staff and partner guidance paper by the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID):

When considering specific program interventions, we must identify opportunities to work at the interface between state and society . . . The aim is to link state and society in ways

that promote inclusive decision making and accountability. (DFID 2010, 44)

The now widely accepted rights-based approach to development echoes this dual top-down and bottom-up approach (Jonsson 2003; Uvin 2004, 2007). The rights-based approach to development focuses on the state as the principal duty-bearer for protecting its population's rights under international law. In turn, intervening actors, including development INGOs, are responsible for (1) helping to fulfill the population's rights in the absence of state capacity, (2) helping the population to claim its rights, and (3) strengthening the state's capacity to provide improved social services, fulfilling its duty (as the duty-bearer) to its population (as the rights holder) (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Jonsson 2003; Uvin 2004). By adopting a rights-based approach to development, development INGOs have made increasing state bureaucratic capacity central to their advocacy and service provision efforts, attempting simultaneously to empower the population to claim its social, economic, and cultural rights and to augment state capacity to fulfill these rights (Kindornay, Ron, and Carpenter 2012; Ulleberg 2009).

In short, development INGOs do appear to be aware of the potential downsides of their involvement in a state, especially concerning the idea that they could undermine bureaucratic capacity. They know that strong bureaucratic capacity is considered integral to achieving their aim of fostering long-term economic development (Savoia and Sen 2014). Nonetheless, no existing study systematically examines how INGO involvement influences bureaucratic capacity, leaving a crucial gap in the literature that this article aims to fill.

## Theoretical Model and Hypothesis

Building on the existing literature, we argue that the effects of INGOs on bureaucratic capacity are conditioned by a country's regime type: *in countries with democratic regimes, the presence of INGOs leads to increased bureaucratic capacity*. In crafting our argument, we focus on development INGOs, an issue area where INGOs have attempted to address their critics, as discussed above, by describing how their concurrent top-down and bottom-up strategies help to build bureaucratic capacity (Ulleberg 2009). Development INGOs aim simultaneously to (1) empower citizens to advocate with their governments for social improved social services and (2) directly implement development projects intended to provide social services in the meantime.

In a democratic state, as opposed to a nondemocratic state, the government has more of an incentive to respond

to citizen demands for improved bureaucratic capacity to deliver social services. Selectorate theory argues that because democratic governments require a large coalition of people to win elections—in other words, they have to win the vote of the majority of citizens or their representatives—they have the incentive to respond to the needs of the broader population (Bearce 2013; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). In a nondemocratic state, the government requires the support of a much smaller group of elite individuals—a smaller winning coalition—to maintain its power, creating fewer incentives for nondemocratic governments to respond to increased population demands (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Kosack 2003).

Although nondemocratic governments still must be cognizant of population demands and any outward signs of population unrest, the leadership of nondemocratic regimes is likely to be most concerned with dissent among members of the ruling coalition (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Svoboda 2009). As time goes on, the regime leadership in some nondemocratic governments may even insulate themselves from serious threats by the ruling coalition (Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014; Levitsky and Way 2010). Regardless, members of the ruling coalition are not typically the targets of development INGO citizen advocacy campaigns or service provision projects. They are unlikely to be persuaded by INGO efforts to increase demands for government services and bureaucratic capacity. Following this logic, increased popular demand for improved social services by citizens, bolstered by the work of INGOs, is more likely to lead to improved bureaucratic capacity in democracies than in nondemocracies.

Furthermore, given the focus of many development INGOs on advocacy and rights-based project implementation, democratic governments may be more likely to share the INGOs' values and collaborate directly with them, in turn reinforcing the government's bureaucratic capacity (Ulleberg 2009, 25). In nondemocratic countries, however, development INGOs may be less willing to collaborate directly with the state, either because of mutual fear of cooptation or because the state does not condone or permit INGOs rights-based approach (Bush 2015). Furthermore, many nondemocratic countries have made it more difficult for INGOs to freely work within their borders (Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014; Cooley 2015; Hayman 2016). In these countries, INGO activities are constrained, leaving INGOs with little leeway to work in ways that would influence bureaucratic capacity, particularly as it relates to the rights-based development agenda that is widely employed by development INGOs (Teets 2014). Instead, in some nondemocratic countries, INGOs may be highly limited in what they can do with the state and within the state. This implies that development INGOs would be less likely to

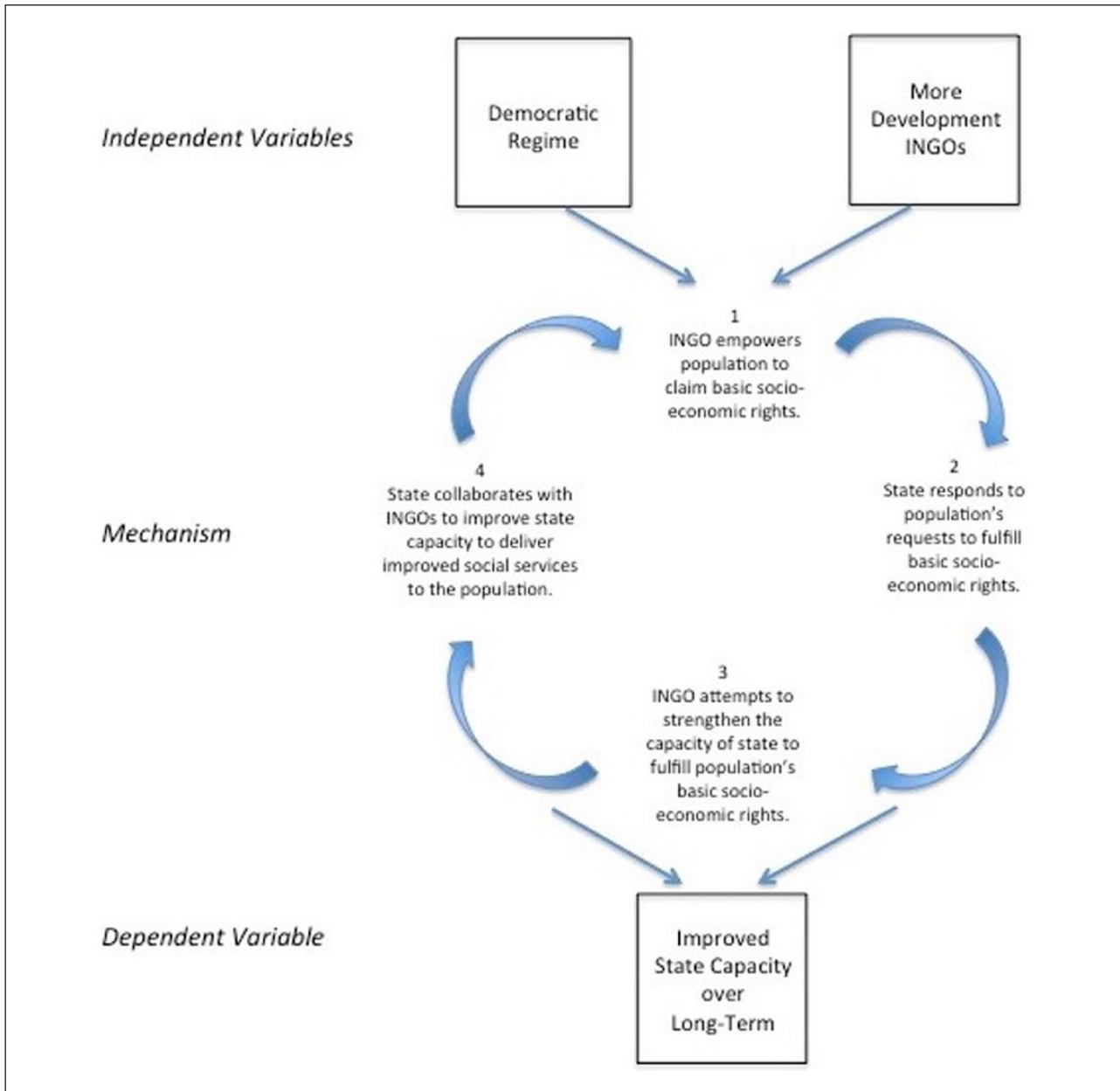
strengthen bureaucratic capacity in nondemocracies than in democratic countries.

The explanatory mechanisms underlying our hypothesis are pictured in Figure 1. In Step 1 of this figure, development INGOs attempt to empower the population to claim their basic social and economic rights by informing the population of these rights and by providing goods and services, demonstrating what it feels like to have these rights fulfilled. As the presence of development INGOs engaged in this bottom-up advocacy and service provision work increases, leading to increased population demand for improved social services, the government will be incentivized, according to the selectorate theory logic articulated above, to respond with improved provision of goods and services.

In Step 2, a democratic state that faces increasing demands from its population for better social services is likely to respond by improving the capacity of the state to fulfill these demands, augmenting its bureaucratic capacity. Even if the party in power does not respond to population demands, its political opponents may use popular demands for improved service delivery as a competing policy platform, incentivizing a response either by the governing party or its challengers. Over time, this is likely to result in strengthened capacity of a democratic state to deliver goods and services throughout its territory.

In Step 3, the efforts of development INGOs to improve the capacity of a democratic state to fulfill the population's social and economic rights should lead to increased bureaucratic capacity to deliver related goods and services. In nondemocratic states, development INGOs are likely to be more constrained in what they can do and have more limited cooperative opportunities with the government. In democratic states, however, both development INGOs and states aim to fulfill the rights of the population, enabling them to work together to achieve their shared policy goals.

Because of the similarity in their policy approaches, development INGOs are much more likely to work directly through the state's service delivery structures (Step 4), providing crucial financial and technical assistance that strengthens the state's bureaucratic capacity. The funders of INGOs are likely to incentivize them to support any state's bureaucratic structures as part of these donors' global policy commitment to strengthen the state's capacity for sustainable development; in a democracy, it is likely that these donor goals can be met (Knack 2014; OECD-DAC 2007). Improved bureaucratic capacity to deliver social services, in turn, confirms that INGO efforts were worthwhile, giving more credibility to future development INGO efforts to empower the population and collaborate directly with the government. The cycle begins again (Step 1), over time improving the bureaucratic



**Figure 1.** Explanatory mechanism for development INGO effect on improved long-term state capacity.  
INGO = international nongovernmental organizations.

capacity of democratic states to deliver goods and services throughout their territory.

Through this process, INGOs insert themselves into the “tightening of the state-society relationship” (Hall and Schroeder 2006, 4). From this perspective, the interactions between the democratic state and society, including those facilitated by development INGOs, help to strengthen the state’s responsiveness to its society and the reach of its bureaucracy, or infrastructural power, throughout its territory (Mann 1984). In one state transitioning to democracy, an INGO staff member described

the relationship between the INGO’s community-based activities and the state:

In general, the administration is there and they are just informed about what we are doing, but nothing else. The structures of the state have much more influence than [we do]. When we work together we have much more of a chance of impact than [my INGO] does alone. When [my INGO] leaves, the administration should continue to support what we have done . . . There were times when it was not easy to approach the government. We have the chance to have peace and this is a good occasion to work together. Now there is an opportunity.<sup>4</sup>

In nondemocratic countries, even those such as Afghanistan that are attempting to build their bureaucratic capacity, we hypothesize that the presence of more development INGOs will not likely strengthen the bureaucratic capacity of the state because the regime does not have the same incentive to respond to increased citizen demands as in democratic states. Citizens in nondemocratic states, in turn, may not demand improved state social services in part because they view the state as ineffective and corrupt and have seen limited responses to previous citizen demands (Mukhopadhyay 2014).

In nondemocratic states, such as Uganda in the early 2000s, where the state is not as responsive to the needs of its population, development INGOs may implement activities that may reinforce the short-term capacity of the state. But as an evaluation of the effect of an HIV-AIDS project on Uganda's health capacity illustrates, once the development INGO's project ends, its effect on bureaucratic capacity dissipates because neither the development INGO nor the state invests in sustaining this bureaucratic capacity over the long term (Bukenya 2013). The INGO can be used by the nondemocratic state in the short term (Teets 2014). However, the INGO is likely to be more constrained in how it could maneuver with the local population and existing bureaucrats, limiting any increases in citizen demands or long-term bureaucratic changes (Carothers and Brenchenmacher 2014; Cooley 2015; Hayman 2016). Democratic states are, thus, both more responsive to the needs of their populations and are more likely to collaborate with development INGOs in ways that will affect long-term bureaucratic capacity than nondemocratic states.

## Research Design

To assess the validity of our hypothesis, we employ a time-series cross-sectional statistical framework to examine how a country's regime type conditions the influence of development INGO presence on bureaucratic capacity in both the short- and the long-term.

## Dependent Variable

There are many potential indicators of state capacity that could serve as our dependent variable (Hendrix 2010; Savoia and Sen 2014). We choose to focus on a measure of *bureaucratic capacity* because it more closely aligns with development INGOs' and the existing literature's focus on state provision of goods. It also offers greater time and country coverage than the alternatives. Our measure for bureaucratic capacity, the average annual bureaucratic quality score from the ICRG, captures the capacity of the state to govern "without drastic changes in policy or interruptions in government services" (ICRG

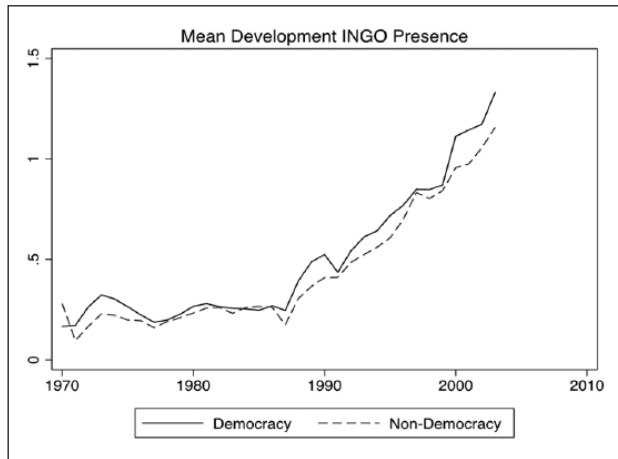
2012, 7). This continuous measure ranges from 0 to 4, with the higher number representing greater bureaucratic quality. The ICRG ratings are based on subjective expert assessments along three dimensions: regular, meritocratic recruitment and advancement processes; insulation from political pressure; and the ability to provide services during government changes. This measure of state capacity enables us to assess the capacity of the government bureaucracy to deliver goods and services throughout its territory (Savoia and Sen 2014).

In all models, we include a lagged dependent variable (LDV) and measure our dependent variable one year in the future ( $t + 1$ ). We do this both to account for serial autocorrelation and because it allows us to focus first on how development INGOs and regime type interact and then how this interaction affects changes in bureaucratic quality one year later.<sup>5</sup>

## Key Independent Variable

Our key independent variable, *Development INGO Presence*, is the count of development INGOs with a member or volunteer in a country in a given year normalized by the log of a state's population.<sup>6</sup> These data come from Smith and Wiest's (2005) coding of the *Yearbook of International Organizations* (UIA 2014). Smith and Wiest (2005, 2012) collected this data at three-year intervals; we interpolate the years that they did not gather. International development NGOs are one of the most widely spread categories of INGOs with much diversity in the goods and services delivered and advocacy practices employed (Murdie 2014). Unlike purely humanitarian INGOs, which are more uniformly criticized for undermining bureaucratic capacity (de Waal 1997), development INGOs receive both praise and criticism in terms of their relationship to bureaucratic capacity (Ell 2008; IRIN News 2009; Karajkov 2007). Development INGOs, therefore, provide a sample that is comparatively large, widely geographically distributed, and potentially heterogeneous in its relationship to bureaucratic capacity, enabling us to examine how the interaction between INGO presence and different regime types (democracies and nondemocracies) influence a state's bureaucratic capacity.

We use a dichotomous regime type variable from Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010) to measure democracy. Democracy is defined as a regime where the legislature is elected and multiple political parties. Figure 2 illustrates the mean *Development INGO Presence* variable over the course of available data for both democracies and dictatorships. Since we are primarily concerned with how the effect of development INGO presence is conditioned by regime type, it is important to confirm that development INGOs presence is not a function of



**Figure 2.** Development INGO per capita over time. INGO = international nongovernmental organizations.

regime type, which might introduce selection issues or bias our findings if threshold effects influence the relationship between development INGO presence and bureaucratic capacity. As shown in Figure 2, democracies and nondemocracies show similar levels of development INGO presence across the years in our sample. For our sample of states and years, the mean number of our weighted indicator, development INGOs presence in democracies, is 0.942 (minimum of 0 to maximum of 2.688) and the mean for dictatorships is 0.761 (minimum of 0 to maximum of 2.437).

Figure 2 illustrates a clear temporal trend in development INGO presence. To address concerns that any results are simply picking up this temporal trend, we include yearly fixed-effects in each of the models presented below.<sup>7</sup>

### Additional Covariates

We include a number of control variables that are consistent with the extant literature and our theoretical priors (Savoia and Sen 2014). Our base model specification includes controls for *Common Law Heritage*, *Trade per GDP*, the natural log of *GDP per Capita*, *Aid per GDP*, and its interaction with *Democracy*.

*Aid per GDP* comes from the *AidData* project (Tierney et al. 2011), and the GDP data are from the World Bank Group's (2014) World Development Indicators. We include this variable because more aid could attract development INGO involvement and because aid is associated with reduced bureaucratic capacity (Busse and Gröning 2009; Knack 2000; Savoia and Sen 2014). We also interact this variable with *Democracy*, because studies have shown that regime type conditions foreign aid's efficacy (Burnside and Dollar 2000; Kosack 2003).

*Common Law Heritage* is a dichotomous measure of whether the country's legal origin is English Common Law or not (La Porta et al. 1999). We include this measure because legal history is associated with a state's capacity to guarantee property rights and bureaucracy capacity to operate independently of the executive (La Porta et al. 1999; Savoia and Sen 2014).

*Trade* and *GDP per Capita* measures are also included in the models. We include *Trade* because previous research has shown a strong relationship between economic integration and an increase in INGO activities (Smith and Wiest 2005). We include *GDP per Capita* because the literature has shown relationships between the degree of development and bureaucratic capacity (Besley and Persson 2007). These measures come from the World Bank Group's (2014) World Development Indicators. Last, we estimate our models with panel-corrected standard errors to address issues of panel heterogeneity (Beck and Katz 2011).<sup>8</sup>

## Results

In our sample of non-OECD countries for the years 1984 to 2003, we find that the relationship between development INGOs and long-term bureaucratic capacity is conditioned by regime type.<sup>9</sup> In democracies, more development INGOs are associated with better bureaucratic capacity, both in the short and the long term. In nondemocracies, we find that development INGO presence does not have an effect on bureaucratic capacity. Given the conventional negative view of INGOs as "slowly remov[ing] all the flesh from the state" (Ell 2008), these results suggest that development INGOs can actually *help* the state when existing state institutions allow. If state institutional arrangements are not favorable to direct cooperation with development INGOs, like in the case nondemocracies, we find no evidence of the positive or negative effect of development INGOs on bureaucratic capacity, either in the short or long term. Below, we outline our modeling decisions before presenting our statistical results.

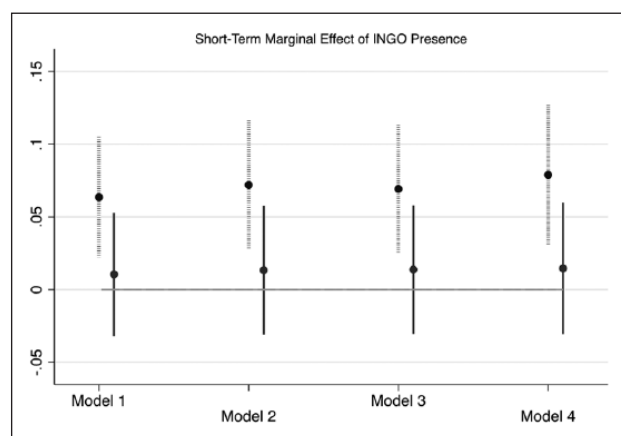
Table 1 presents the results of both our baseline model and three robustness tests.<sup>10</sup> The first column, model 1, presents a basic specification in which we include yearly fixed effects and a limited number of control variables. Because we included an interactive effect, the sign and the significance of the development INGO presence coefficient indicates that when democracy equals zero (i.e., among nondemocracies), the effect of development INGO presence on bureaucratic capacity is statistically insignificant. Similarly, when development INGO presence is absent, democracy has no impact on our outcome of interest. However, the interaction term between democracy and development INGO presence is positive



**Table 1.** Development INGO Presence and Bureaucratic Capacity.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
INGO Presence	0.0105 (0.0216)	0.0133 (0.0226)	0.0138 (0.0226)	0.0146 (0.0231)
Democracy	0.0121 (0.0267)	0.0208 (0.0313)	0.0166 (0.0317)	0.0200 (0.0335)
Democracy × INGO Presence	0.0530* (0.0254)	0.0587* (0.0248)	0.0554* (0.0246)	0.0644* (0.0260)
LDV	0.902*** (0.0105)	0.886*** (0.0118)	0.882*** (0.0119)	0.878*** (0.0121)
Aid/GDP	0.106 (0.101)	0.163 (0.0999)	0.168 (0.104)	0.145 (0.105)
Democracy × Aid/GDP	-0.324* (0.155)	-0.460** (0.156)	-0.488** (0.159)	-0.436** (0.161)
Common Law	-0.00599 (0.0246)	-0.0363 (0.0252)	-0.0345 (0.0259)	-0.0518 (0.0281)
Conflict on Location	-0.000466 (0.00857)	-0.00764 (0.00878)	-0.00803 (0.00916)	-0.00900 (0.00935)
Trade/GDP	0.000303 (0.000179)	0.0000682 (0.000212)	0.0000622 (0.000214)	0.0000694 (0.000219)
ln(GDPPC)	0.0335*** (0.00893)	0.0428*** (0.0102)	0.0397*** (0.0103)	0.0434*** (0.0103)
UN Affinity			0.139* (0.0601)	
Durability				0.000912* (0.000398)
Oil Prod./GDP				-0.0787 (0.0452)
Democracy × Oil Prod./GDP				-0.0576 (0.0873)
Observations	1,728	1,728	1,699	1,618
R <sup>2</sup>	.90	.94	.94	.94
Fixed effects	Year	Year, Region	Year, Region	Year, Region

Standard errors in parentheses. INGO = international nongovernmental organizations; LDV = lagged dependent variable; GDPPC = GDP per Capita. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



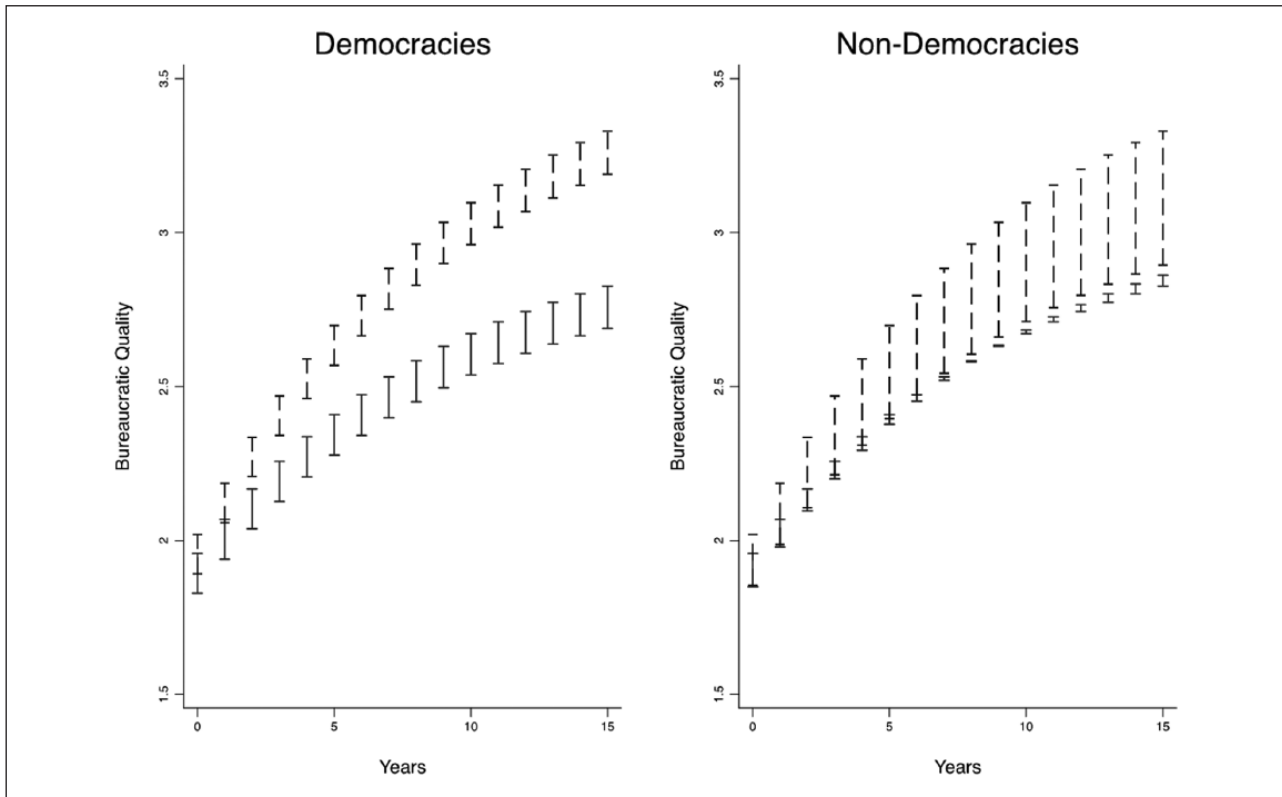
**Figure 3.** Marginal effect of development INGO presence in democracies and nondemocracies.

Spikes indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals around the mean marginal effect (dots) for each regime type. The marginal effect for democratic and nondemocratic states are shown in dashed bars and solid bars, respectively. INGO = international nongovernmental organizations.

and statistically significant. To illustrate the significance and substantive effect, we present the marginal effect of INGO capacity across both regime types in Figure 3 for each of the models we present in Table 1. For each model, the dashed and solid bars indicate the 95 percent confidence interval around the marginal effect of development

INGO presence for both democracies and nondemocracies, respectively. As is clear, the lower bounds of the confidence interval around the marginal effect for democratic states, based on model 1's estimates, exceed zero. The same is not true for nondemocratic states.

The remaining models in Table 1 test the robustness of this finding. First, previous research has indicated different regional patterns in the work of INGOs (Murdie and Hicks 2013). As such, we add regional fixed effects to our baseline scenario in model 2. The next two models shown in Table 1 retain region fixed effects but also include additional controls for a number of additional potentially confounding factors. In model 3, we introduce a control for a country's voting affinity in the United Nations with major states that are countries of origin for INGOs (Strezhnev and Voeten 2013). This variable, *UN Affinity*, measures a country's highest voting affinity score to either the United States, the United Kingdom, France, or Germany. Because many development INGOs are believed to be aligned with the United States and other Western powers, the further a recipient country is from voting with the United States, the less likely their citizens could be to trust in development INGOs intervening there (Guarrieri 2018). Since development INGOs that fail to gain the trust of a host population will likely fail to empower citizens to claim their socioeconomic rights, it is important to consider this potentially confounding variable.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 4.** Long-term effect of development INGO presence in democracies and nondemocracies.

Capped bars indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals around the prediction. The dashed bars hold INGO presence at 1 SD above the mean. The solid bars hold INGO presence at 1 SD below the mean. INGO = international nongovernmental organizations.

In model 4, we address several more potentially confounding effects. First, the durability of the regime may affect the ability of states to build capacity while potentially influencing decisions of development INGOs to develop a presence in a state. Several studies have found that reliance on nontax revenues, such as oil rents, can undermine bureaucratic capacity by distancing a government from its need for taxation (Besley and Persson 2010). In addition, since oil-reliant regimes tend to be autocratic, it is possible that development INGO presence may have additional barriers to overcome in improving bureaucratic capacity due to a state's alternative revenue sources. Since the effect of oil rents is potentially conditioned by regime type (Bhattacharya and Hodler 2010), we also interact this variable with democracy.

In each of these robustness checks, the coefficients of development INGO presence and its interaction with democracy remain consistent with our baseline specification. As illustrated in Figure 3 the confidence interval around the marginal effect for democratic states is entirely positive and indistinguishable from zero for nondemocratic states in each of the remaining models. In fact, the effect appears much larger in our most complete specification (model 4). In all, this provides strong support for

our hypothesis. While the effect of development INGO presence is indistinguishable from zero among nondemocratic states, it has a clear positive correlation with democratic states.

The coefficients and marginal effects reported thus far indicate the short-term impact of development INGO presence on bureaucratic capacity. While interesting, changes in bureaucratic capacity may take many years to occur (Savoia and Sen 2014). Thus, the effect of development INGOs on bureaucratic capacity is likely to be most visible in the long run. The information contained in the estimates of the models we have presented makes it easy to calculate the long-term effects of our covariates (De Boef and Keele 2008). The long term effect can be calculated with the following formula:

$$\text{LTE}_k = \frac{\beta_k}{(1 - \beta_0)},$$

where  $k$  is the variable of interest and  $\beta_0$  is the estimated coefficient of the LDV.

To illustrate the substantive long-term effect and its statistical significance over time, Figure 4 employs dynamic simulations as recommended by Williams and Whitten

(2012). In line with this approach, we simulate the long-term effect of development INGO presence over 15 years at 1 *SD* above and below the mean for both democracies and nondemocracies. Using the estimates of model 1, each of the four scenarios starts at the sample mean of bureaucratic quality and adjusts with the prediction of each scenario independently, holding all other variables constant at their mean or modal value.

The bars in each panel of Figure 4 indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals around each scenario. The dashed bars indicate the scenarios in which development INGO presence is held 1 *SD* above the mean and the solid bars indicate the scenarios in which development INGO presence is held 1 *SD* below the mean. In each panel, we see that bureaucratic quality increases over time. However, only in the first (democratic) panel do we see that development INGO presence has substantively interesting statistically significant effect on the trajectory as the low development INGO and high development INGO presence scenarios diverge and no longer overlap in the third year. After 15 years, states with a low development INGO presence are more than 0.5 points lower on the bureaucratic quality scale that ranges from 0 to 4 than states with a higher development INGO presence. In the nondemocratic state panel, there is little apparent difference between high and low development INGO presence states. While a statistically significant difference is apparent eight years out from the starting point, the substantive effect is much smaller than observed among democratic states.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond the coefficients directly relevant to our hypothesis, our results have additional implications. Most notably, we find that the effect of foreign aid dependence, also conditional on regime type, is highly different from that of development INGO presence. In each of the models, the coefficient for Aid/GDP is insignificant indicating that aid dependence has no statistical association with bureaucratic capacity in nondemocracies. In contrast, the interaction term is negative and significant. As we illustrate in the online appendix, the marginal effect of Aid/GDP on bureaucratic quality is significant and negative among democratic states in models 2 to 4 but is indistinguishable from zero when employing the estimates of model 1. The apparent relationship between aid dependence and bureaucratic capacity further demonstrates that our measure of development INGO presence is not a simple proxy for foreign aid and there is merit in exploring the impact of development INGO presence independently.

One potential explanation for the diverging findings in relation to development INGO presence and foreign aid is that increased amounts of foreign aid have a similar effect as oil revenues, providing the government with a source of funding that is not linked to its citizens,

potentially decreasing the degree of responsiveness of governments to citizen demands and a dependence on tax revenue (Moss, Pettersson, and van de Walle 2006). The resources and advocacy that development INGOs bring to a state, in contrast, are not fungible and provide little incentive for democratic states to neglect domestic populations.

### *Robustness to Alternative Measure of Democracy*

It is possible that our findings for democracy are driven by our choice of a binary indicator of democracy. While we think this variable is well suited both to separate democracies from nondemocracies and is helpful in demonstrating the marginal effects of development INGO presence across regime type, this simple treatment of regime type fails to appreciate the complexity of regime type and obscures interesting dynamics. As such, we present models and corresponding figures in our online appendix that demonstrate that our results are robust to substituting our binary indicator with both the 21-point Polity index (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2010) and the latent Unified Democracy Score (Pemstein et al. 2010).

### *Development INGO Behavior and Selection across Regime Type?*

Thus far, we have assumed that development INGOs act similarly in all regime types. However, it is possible that the conditional effect of democracy is picking up differences in development INGO activities within states. If true, this would undermine our theoretical explanation for the conditional effect of democracy on regime type. Here, we condition two potential alternative explanations for our findings. First, it is possible that development INGOs attract more funding when operating in democratic states, and consequently, development INGOs that operate in democracies may have more resources at their disposal and, thus, can have a larger impact on a state's capacity. We assess this possibility by examining the distribution of aid targeted to INGOs from 1985 to 2004 using data from AidData (Tierney et al. 2011).

If INGOs are trying harder in democratic states, then they should be receiving resources for and directing resources to those states. Consequently, development INGO presence should lead to a larger inflow of INGO-related aid in democratic, relative to nondemocratic, states. To test this effect, we estimate the effect of development INGO presence on the log of NGO-purposed aid conditioned by a state's regime type. We control for a country's size and need with the log of population and gross domestic product. We also consider its relationship to the outside world by including the ratio of trade

**Table 2.** Development INGO Presence and Aid Inflows.

	(5)
LDV	0.0941 (0.0622)
Democracy	0.178 (0.104)
INGO Presence	0.236* (0.110)
INGO Presence × Democracy	-0.200 (0.137)
Ln(Population)	0.128*** (0.0369)
Ln(GDP)	-0.0612* (0.0253)
Trade/GDP	0.00110 (0.000633)
Observations	2,266
R <sup>2</sup>	.0534
Fixed effects	Year

Standard errors in parentheses. INGO = international nongovernmental organizations; LDV = lagged dependent variable. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

to GDP and yearly fixed effects to address global fluctuations. The estimates of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

The positive coefficient of development INGO presence indicates that when democracy is equal to zero, development INGO presence is associated with increased NGO-purposed aid. The negative coefficient on the interaction term indicates that when democracy is set to one, this effect diminished. Furthermore, the coefficient for democracy indicates that regime type has no statistically significant relationship with the inflows of NGO-purposed funds and does not gain significance as development INGO presence increases within a state. To the extent we are able to measure development INGO effort and resources, we find no statistical relationship that suggests development INGOs attract more resources to democratic states than nondemocratic states. As such, we have greater confidence that our results are the product of the theoretical process we outlined above and not differences in the activities of development INGOs across regime type.

Next, the types of development INGOs present in a country might differ by regime type, making it possible that development INGOs present in democratic states may differ in important ways from development INGOs present in nondemocracies. To address this concern, we calculated the distribution of development INGO presence across regime type for each development INGO in our sample's time frame using the binary indicator of INGO membership in the Smith and Wiest's (2005) data set. In the time frame used in the above analysis, the mean proportion of democratic state membership for development INGOs was 0.44. In other words, the average development INGO was in a democratic state 44 percent of the time. Furthermore, only 12 percent of the development INGOs in our sample had more than 80 percent of their

presence in democratic states.<sup>13</sup> The data suggests that a bulk of the development INGOs in our sample operate in both democratic and nondemocratic states. Consequently, we have little reason to believe that our results stem from differences in the development INGOs operating across regime types. In a final test, we explored whether the distribution of development INGOs with additional mandates differed across regime type. In our online appendix, we report additional results in which we use an indicator of pure development INGOs and an additional model in which we use an indicator of development INGOs that also include additional mandates.<sup>14</sup> Using each measure, our results largely reflect those presented above. As such, it is unlikely that multi-mandate INGOs are driving our findings.

## Conclusion

How does the presence of development INGOs affect long-term bureaucratic capacity? Many development INGOs aim to alleviate poverty in part by improving the capacity of the state to provide social services to its population. Development INGOs aim to do this across a broad range of regime types, from oppressive dictatorships to liberal democracies. Our findings show, however, that they are only likely to affect the bureaucratic capacity of democracies. Development INGO efforts to empower the population are well received by democratic countries, who respond by collaborating with development INGOs and responding to citizen demands. Nondemocratic states, however, are not as responsive to their citizen demands, or development INGO efforts to empower them, nor are development INGOs and nondemocratic governments as likely to collaborate closely. Consequently, the presence of development INGOs in nondemocratic countries is not related to significant increases in state bureaucratic capacity.

The literature on development aid has increasingly emphasized the need for international development to improve the bureaucratic capacity of the state, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries where the state is relatively weak (DFID 2010). Because the political institutions in many fragile and conflict-affected countries possess many of the characteristics of dictatorships—weak free press, security institutions that are not accountable to the rule of law, unfair or nonexistent democratic elections—our findings suggest that development INGOs are unlikely to fully achieve their poverty-reduction goals in nondemocratic countries. Although the work of development INGOs could still alleviate poverty and provide social services, development INGOs working in nondemocracies are unlikely to strengthen the state's capacity to provide these services themselves.

While we have provided evidence that development INGOs do not allocate more resources to democracies, it is unclear whether the inability of development INGOs to achieve their dual poverty alleviation goals in nondemocracies is due to their deployment of different standard operating procedures in nondemocracies as opposed to democracies (Bush 2015). Further research would be useful to examine these causal mechanisms in more depth. Investigating the mechanisms at play through in-depth case study research would shed light on the precise incentives in the democracy-development INGO relationship and exact practices of INGOs in these contexts. Furthermore, disaggregation of both democracies and dictatorships into subtypes would enable researchers to examine how variation within regime type might lead to a differential effect of development INGO presence on bureaucratic capacity. As Heurlin (2010) has argued, it could be that the effect of INGOs is dependent both on the type of nondemocratic regime and on the development policy prevalent within the country. We hope future work can focus on variation within nondemocratic regimes.

In spite of the remaining open questions, the significance of these findings for development INGOs is clear: the hundreds of development INGOs operating in nondemocratic countries are unlikely to have a significant effect, positive or negative, on the capacity of the state. At the same time, our findings suggest that in democratic countries, development INGOs have a significant long-term positive effect on the state's bureaucratic capacity, a core component of poverty-alleviation strategies, challenging the numerous critiques of the supposed deleterious effects of INGOs on bureaucratic capacity.

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### Notes

1. We define an INGO as an open membership not-for-profit organization that is active in at least three countries.
2. Our research focuses solely on development INGOs that deliver goods and services, not on pure advocacy organizations that do not deliver goods and services. Among these development INGOs, however, many do advocate for specific policy changes and normative changes (Murdie and Hicks 2013). And, advocacy about economic, social, and cultural rights is often part of their service delivery.

3. For more INGO examples, please see our online appendix.
4. INGO Burundi staff member (C1), Bujumbura, interview, 2009.
5. We also ran state-dependent models, where we interact our key interaction term with the lagged dependent variable; see the online appendix. Our results do not indicate that the effect of development INGOs is constrained to only countries that begin with high levels of bureaucratic capacity.
6. Analyses with a de-trended version of the development INGO variable are included in the online appendix and are statistically similar.
7. Results with a yearly trend variable are statistically similar (see online appendix).
8. Summary statistics included in the online appendix.
9. Development INGOs tend to implement activities predominantly in non-OECD countries. A list of countries in our sample is provided in the online appendix.
10. We note that the *R*-squared of each model is quite high. We attribute this to the inclusion of the lagged dependent variable.
11. A robustness test with corruption is included in the online appendix.
12. Furthermore, this long-term effect is no longer significant among nondemocratic states when moving from 1 *SD* below the mean to the mean. This suggests that the very small effect is only relevant in scenarios where nondemocratic countries have a development INGO presence around the mean and then see an increase in that presence. The relationship among democracies persists for changes at both the high and low end of the INGO presence variable.
13. We present a histogram of the distribution of INGO proportion of democratic state members in the online appendix.
14. In all, 28 percent of development INGOs have no other goals. The remaining INGOs have stated goals to work to improve human rights (22%), women's specific development and rights (26%), and peace (25%).

### Supplemental Materials

Supplemental materials for this article are available with the manuscript on the *Political Research Quarterly* (PRQ) website. Replication data are available at <http://www.matthewdigiu-seppe.com/>.

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