The Political Psychology of Issue Selection in Transnational Advocacy Networks



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Abstract

Why do international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) expend considerable resources to alleviate some forms of humanitarian crises, while other crises fail to attract similar levels of attention? How can we explain why some humanitarian issues are selected for attention by transnational advocacy networks (TANs) over others? Existing scholarship suggests that issue attributes help determine the advocacy agendas of transnational actors. Issues which fit well with pre-existing national and international political agendas, resonate with accepted transnational norms, or exude a simple causal chain of blame, are putatively conducive to selection. However, explanations emphasising these factors remain without empirical corroboration. Recent empirical studies suggest such factors co-occur with instances of non-selection and that variation in choice outcomes cannot be accounted for through existing explanatory frameworks. This study advances a political psychology approach to the question of issue selection by INGOs. Drawing on insights from behavioural decision research, it empirically tests the proposition that heuristic-led judgment on the part of key decision-makers is a central determinant in the (non-)adoption of issues by INGOs. The proposed explanation is investigated empirically through a mixed-method research design, encompassing case studies of three major INGOs and a conjoint survey experiment with INGO practitioners. The study finds both qualitative and experimental evidence that heuristic-led judgment contributes to choice outcomes across organizational contexts. Additional factors such as access to reliable information, probability of policy impact, and issue coverage by other INGOs, also appear to affect patterns of selection.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Explaining Issue Selection in Advocacy Networks

In August 2015, delegates to the decision-making forum of Amnesty International, the International Council Meeting (ICM), passed a resolution calling on its International Board to enact a policy on the rights of sex workers. Published in May 2016, the policy identified states' obligations to protect sex workers from exploitation, trafficking, and violence. Among its recommendations, Amnesty called on governments to "repeal existing laws and refrain from introducing new laws that criminalize or penalize directly or in practice the consensual exchange of sexual services between adults for remuneration" (Amnesty 2016).[1]

Amnesty's proposals for the decriminalization of consensual sex work proved extremely contentious in the human rights movement. Prior to adoption, a draft version of the policy was leaked to the press and generated severe backlash against the organization (Grimley 2015). A senior policy official involved in the deliberations on sex work recalled that the leak prompted "an astonishing level of media coverage" across the world, much of it critical (Interview ID: A).[2] The group faced significant opposition from governments, partner organizations, writers, academics, and influential advocacy groups such as The Elders, European Women's Lobby, Equality Now, and the King Center. An aggressive lobbying campaign was initiated to prevent the policy's adoption. Former US President and founder of the Carter Center, Jimmy Carter, issued letters to Amnesty officials urging them not to support the proposed policy.[3] Protest demonstrations were held outside of Amnesty International offices. The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) launched a petition against the move, enlisting the backing of high-profile celebrities.[4] Throughout this period Amnesty suffered significant reputational damage. Relationships with partners and supporters were severely strained. Critics

[1] For convenience Amnesty International shall be referred to as either 'Amnesty' or 'AI'.
[2] Interview ID: A. Senior Policy Advisor.
[3] For coverage of the letter see: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/12/world/europe/amnesty-international-votes-for-policy-calling-for-decriminalization-of-prostitution.html
[4] http://www.catwinternational.org/Home/Article/669-amnesty-international-not-in-our-name

argued the organization's policy went far beyond the tenets of international law, as well as the standards and norms of the women's movement. They were accused of undermining the cause of vulnerable women and, at worst, being complicit in a regime that trafficked and abused them. Despite these major challenges, the group formally ratified the decriminalization policy.[5]

From the perspective of dominant IR paradigms, the adoption of Amnesty's policy on sex workers presents an empirical puzzle. Amnesty's decision meant that it would diverge from its organizational partners, clash with governments (many of which Amnesty collaborated with to advance its work), suffer reputational harm, alienate supporters, and place funding streams at risk. Under these circumstances, decision-makers would have anticipated negative material returns in any cost-benefit calculation. Moreover, that Amnesty's position conflicted with international norms in the women's movement was cited by critics as a central reason for their opposition.[6] And yet, among a large menu of potential issue options, Amnesty chose to focus attention on a high-profile issue area that lacked normative consensus and which would likely work against its own self-interest. In arriving at this policy choice, decision-making appears to have been governed by an alternative motivational logic.

Why do INGOs expend considerable resources to tackle some human rights issues, while others fail to attract similar levels of attention? Under what conditions will INGOs act against existing norms and their own apparent self-interest? And how can we explain why some issues are selected for attention by transnational advocacy networks (TANs) over others? To help explain patterns of issue selection this study adopts insights from social and cognitive psychology. In recent decades empirical findings in behaviour decision research have transformed thinking in the policy world and across the social sciences.[7] Major countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany have

[5]https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/amnesty-international-publishes-policy-and-research-on-protection-of-sex-workers-rights/

[6]Here I allude to theories of norm affects in respect of constructivism in its structural variant. Proponents of agential constructivism may adopt a different view, highlighting the role of individuals or institutions as norm agents (Grant 2018; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

[7] The most recent behavioural revolution originates with the work of Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in the 1970s. See: Tversky and Kahneman (1974) and Kahneman and Tverksy (1979). However, this research had important progenitors, most notably the work of Herbert Simon (1955) on bounded rationality.

initiated schemes, under the auspices of so-called *Nudge Units*, which utilize insights from the behavioural sciences to alter architectures of human choice and improve outcomes in diverse areas such as health, education, and environmental protection (Sunstein 2016).[8] A 2017 report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), citing over 100 global case studies, notes that behavioural insights have taken root across various policy sectors. The OECD have proposed that, rather than merely optimizing existing public policy designs, behavioural insights should now be embedded within new policy administration structures (OECD 2017). Moreover, receipt of the 2017 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences by Richard Thaler – a leading voice in behavioural economics – is indicative of the growing influence of behavioural ideas.

Behavioural insights have been no less impactful in the social sciences, building on developmental advances spearheaded by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (1974; 1979). By distinguishing between descriptively realistic depictions of human choice and the conventional assumptions made by analysts of social, political, and economic behaviour, this research program has laid the groundwork for influential sub-disciplines such as behavioural economics. (Camerer, Loewenstein, and Rabin 2004, xxii). Much like their economist counterparts, political psychologists have also been attuned to innovations in cognitive psychology and share the conviction that enhancing the descriptive realism of psychological micro-foundations in analyses of political decision-making can help contribute theoretical insights, generate better predictions, and improve policy-making (Camerer and Loewenstein 2004).

Applying psychologically plausible micro-foundations of political behaviour is not new to IR. Following Herbert Simon (1959, p. 96), a coterie of IR scholars recognised decision-maker and objective environment as being separated by processes of perception and cognition. Early models of interstate bargaining, conflict, deterrence, and crisis dynamics, all benefited from the incorporation of psychological frameworks such as prospect theory (Allison 1971; Janis 1972; Jervis 1976; Lebow

[8] This list of policy areas where behavioural science has been applied extends well beyond these issues to include: economic growth, law, energy, poverty reduction, consumer protection, organizational management, labour markets, and taxation.

1981; Jervis, Lebow, and Stein 1985; Herrmann 1985; Khong 1992). In more recent years a wave of experimental studies have contributed more specified maps of the systematic biases which inform bounded rationality[9] – as well as scope conditions for their operation – leading to a resurgence of political psychology in IR (Kahneman 2003; Saunders 2017).

Despite these successes the diffusion of behavioural insights to IR scholarship and public policymaking has been haphazard. A lack of systematic integration of these ideas into IR research programs has resulted in work being almost exclusively pitched towards decision-making at the state level. These state-centric approaches are out of sync with a growing body of theoretical and empirical literature that posits the increasingly critical importance of non-state actors, such as TANs[10] and INGOs, in international politics (Risse 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998). In applying behavioural insights to explain issue prioritization in INGOs the present study will help to redress this imbalance.

The pervasive impact of TANs on global politics, a phenomenon wherein INGOs are positioned as central actors, has also attracted renewed scholarly attention in the past two decades (Risse-Kappen 1995; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999; 2014; Keck and Sikkink 1998; 1999; Bob 2009; Murdie 2014). This rejuvenation is unsurprising given the proliferation of transnational non-state actors in the post-war period, which saw the number of INGOs operating globally increase from just a few hundred to almost 5,000 by the beginning of the 1990s (Risse 1995, p. 10). Since then more than 50 countries have seen a 500 percent increase in the number of INGOs active in their territory, while several countries have seen INGOs grow to twenty times their previous number (Murdie 2014, pp. 1-5). Concomitant with this pattern of emergence has been a marked increase in humanitarian advocacy, emergency assistance, lobbying over state practice, and service provision which originates from advocacy networks. It has been estimated that non-state humanitarian actors now administer more aid in the developing world than the United Nations or World Bank (Murdie 2014, p. 5). Major

[9] The concept of bounded rationality originates with Simon (1955), who posited that existing models of rational choice based on expected utility theory neglected constraints in human decision-making concerning cognitive limitations, informational resources, and time.

[10] TANs may be defined as distinct non-state actors "…working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services" (Keck and Sikkink 1999, p. 89).

humanitarian organizations have been shown to be integral players in the certification of new human rights, contributing vital resources, information, legitimacy, and media outreach to humanitarian causes, as well as central actors in the mobilization and adoption of human rights norms by state decision-makers (Bob 2009, p. 51). Despite widespread recognition of the importance of TANs in humanitarian politics, and therein patterns of issue prioritization in their work, we know remarkably little about the determinants of TAN preference formation.

Existing scholarship asserts, albeit without empirical corroboration, that issues which fit well with pre-existing national and international agendas, resonate with accepted global norms, transnational norms, or exude a simple causal chain of blame, such as those pertaining to bodily harm and legal ill-treatment of innocent or vulnerable people, are more likely to be met favourably by transnational actors (see: Keck and Sikkink 1999, pp. 98-99; Bob 2005). Carpenter's (2007) comparative study of network advocacy on issues under the rubric of Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) contradicts the notion that the mobilization of transnational support for humanitarian issues is explicable in terms of the issue characteristics which Keck and Sikkink identify. In her study, Carpenter examines patterns of advocacy on behalf of child soldiers, girls in war, and children born as a result of wartime rape. She demonstrates that despite children born of wartime rape being especially vulnerable to abuse, disease, and stigmatization, as well as fitting within established humanitarian agendas and normative frameworks, their cause is absent from advocacy agendas on children in war. On the other hand, while girls in war has attracted a moderate level of attention, child soldiers was shown to be the single most prominent issue among advocates for children in war. Surprisingly, child soldiers garnered more attention than categories such as children at risk of physical attack or being killed (Carpenter 2007, p. 108). These findings suggest that variation in issue prioritisation in TANs cannot be accounted for through existing explanatory frameworks.

Carpenter's findings reflect a broader and confounding pattern in humanitarian decision-making. Despite INGOs and advocacy networks subscribing to the indivisibility and equality of status of human rights, some rights and humanitarian causes have taken precedence over others. For example,

the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014, which claimed the lives of around 11,500 people, produced a large-scale humanitarian aid and research response, despite illnesses such as aids, respiratory infections, malaria, and heart disease each causing several hundreds of thousands of deaths in the same period. Floods in Pakistan in 2010, killing close to 2,000 people and displacing millions, as well as the recent crises in China and the Central African Republic, provoked a muted humanitarian reaction, while repression which occurred during the outbreak of the Arab Spring garnered widespread international attention. As Amnesty International have acknowledged, mobilization of resources for international advocacy has regularly focused on particular violations of civil and political rights, including physical ill-treatment and torture, freedom of speech and religion, extrajudicial killing, and breaches of legal rights such as the right to a fair trial (Amnesty 2014, p. 17).

This mode of prioritization has meant other humanitarian issues, such as those categorized as economic, social, and cultural rights, have received much less attention. In the case of Amnesty, while the organization has long highlighted the importance of these rights, it was not until 2001 that they resolved to actively campaign on them. This has meant humanitarian networks have highlighted relatively isolated breaches of civil and political rights while more harmful humanitarian situations have been neglected. For instance, with child mortality rates standing at 16,000 deaths a day and life-threatening and debilitating diseases,[11] lack of access to water, sanitation, public health facilities, and shelter contributing to millions of deaths annually, these consequential issues have not received proportional attention (You et. al 2015).

This pattern of prioritization by advocacy networks is puzzling given the legal obligations and longstanding normative consensus surrounding economic, social, and cultural rights. These rights are enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights[12] (ICESCR), and confer legal obligations on states (Amnesty 2014, p. 13). The interdependency of human rights is increasingly recognised by major judicial bodies

[11] Neglected diseases include leishmaniasis (kala-azar), onchocerciasis (river blindness), Chagas disease, tuberculosis, schistosomiasis (bilharzias), lymphatic filariasis, African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) (Hunt 2007, p. 3).
[12] The ICESCR came into force in 1976 as part of the International Bill on Human Rights.

such as the European Court of Human Rights (Amnesty 2014, p. 28). The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action declared that all human rights are "universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated", a principle adopted by consensus by participants at the 1993 World Human Rights Conference, including over 170 states, 800 NGOs, academics, and treaty bodies (OHCHR 1993). Extending from this discussion, the research question this study will address is the following:

Research Question: Why do INGOs and transnational advocacy networks prioritize some human rights issues over others?

1.2 The Argument: A Brief Introduction

Current models of issue selection can be categorized into two main schools of thought. On one hand, constructivists promote an optimistic view of humanitarian networks and INGOs. These scholars argue that TANs are typically principled actors that embody the moral ideas of global civil society, drawing their motivations from a shared regard for liberal norms and values (Keck and Sikkink 1998). TAN action is therefore understood as a largely benign or positive influence in international politics, reflecting a more general interest rather than the self-interest of an organization or set of individuals. On the other hand, another school contends that TAN behaviour is determined by material incentives that permeate their operational environment. As Cooley and Ron (2002, p. 6) outline, INGOs may be sensitive to the "organizational insecurity, competitive pressures, and fiscal uncertainty that characterize the transnational sector". The marketization of TAN activities, such as competition over contract work and donors, is seen as a key driver of policy behaviour, with selection reflecting a strategic calculus based on organizational self-interest. To date, neither perspective has been empirically corroborated, with existing research casting doubt on these explanations (Carpenter 2007).

This thesis utilizes insights from behavioural decision research – particularly recent experimental work in social and cognitive psychology – to develop an alternative theory of issue selection. My central proposition is that INGO officials rely on a set of cognitive heuristics to aid decision-making, resolve ethical dilemmas surrounding issue options, and determine preferences on selection. Due to their ontological commitments, existing studies tend to assume certain logics of selection. This study investigates the micro-foundations of preference formation in INGOs, challenges the assumptions of conventional frameworks,[13] and posits that selection choices may be driven by less self-interested or ideational motives. It theorizes that officials use heuristics – specifically the availability, representative, and affect heuristics – to mediate among a pool of available options, and it is through these lower-level mechanisms that INGOs arrive at issue preferences. Reliance on heuristics can help explain how decision-makers make sense of their policy environment, choose from a substantial menu of different issue options, and why much of their policy behaviour appears at odds with the expectations of conventional theories.

In line with much of the literature, this study supposes that INGOs – in part through processes of industry self-selection[14] – are generally principled actors motivated to lessen human harm.[15] In this sense, the proposed theory may be viewed as complementary to existing theories focused on the effects of norms in selection – the general orientation of INGOs to do good is likely shaped by norms in their organizational environment – albeit suggesting they are ultimately incomplete without an accounting of the role of heuristics. To achieve their goals, decision-makers face complex dilemmas in identifying priorities from available issue options. Since the 1990s, human rights coverage has expanded and INGOs active in the sector, having once focused narrowly on civil and

[13] It also moves beyond state-centric approaches, such as Realism, which are limited for explaining the preferences and behaviour of non-state actors such as INGOs.
[14] For discussion of industry self-selection and how to may impact organizational outcomes, see: Felin and Foss 2005: 450.
[15] Though in line with much of the literature, this does not preclude INGOs from engaging in self-interested behaviour. INGOs are not immune from the exigencies of a competitive sector. Motives to lessen human harm may also relate to more instrumental assessments, such as concerns for reputation and support. INGOs will embody such traits to varying degrees, and some are more principled than others. See: Murdie 2014.

political rights, have an increasingly broad area of responsibility. Issues such as economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights, health, the environment, corporate responsibility, women's rights, and LGBT rights, among others, are now viewed as falling within the remit of human rights frameworks. The menu of options available for selection by INGO officials therefore contains issues that are substantively very different, making it difficult to determine which areas should be prioritized. Further complicating matters, most INGOs subscribe to the indivisibility of human rights, viewing them as interconnected and mutually sustaining. They also typically lack institutional frameworks for cross-issue evaluation and comparison. In Tetlock et al.'s (2000) typology, INGO officials face "tragic" trade-offs where "sacred values" – in this case human rights – are pitched against each other. Even if well-intentioned, decision-makers face onerous ethical choices, lacking objective criteria to evaluate the relative importance of issues. The theory posits that INGO officials resolve this dilemma by using cognitive heuristics to arrive at choice outcomes.

Cognitive heuristics may be defined as mental shortcuts or "rules of thumb" which inform and help resolve decisional problems, often with incomplete information (Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982). In the present study, heuristics relate to the judgments of key officials in INGOs, understood as executive members and leading officials within thematic and regional teams. IR scholars have begun to take the causal effects of leader traits more seriously (Saunders 2017; Gallagher and Allen 2014). Individuals may be particularly influential in INGOs due to their centralized character. Such groups lack the "regularized mechanisms for internal debate; loyal oppositions; inter-institutional checks and balances; and independent assessment of policies or leaders" that we associate with democratic leadership (Bob 2007, p. 3). The centralized nature of INGOs and the agenda-setting power of key officials mitigates against problems of aggregation when drawing on behavioural insights. Moreover, recent studies have illustrated how matters of aggregation may be overstated in psychological IR, with such approaches to theorising collective decision-making – based on a process of conceptual abstraction and generalization – compatible with the conventions of theorisation in the discipline, suggesting psychological postulates can be employed to explain decisional patterns across

different levels of analysis (Gildea 2020).[16] In terms of selection, heuristics may help officials perform a number of analytical and decisional tasks. These include (1) categorizing the nature of an issue; (2) evaluating the moral stakes and potential for harm; (3) assessing risks and rewards of issue options; and, as a consequence, (4) determining on what issue the INGO should focus (Khong 1992, p. 10). Heuristics seem particularly salient for selection problems and resolving the ethical dilemma they give rise to. Findings in the psychology of moral judgment suggest moral action is weakly correlated to moral reasoning, with preference formation more tightly linked to intuitive feeling and judgment. What appears to be the product of careful deliberation is commonly an intuitive judgment to which post-hoc rationalizations are attached. Under conditions of moral complexity and in the absence of clear comparative metrics – as is the case with selection decisions – the use of heuristics is especially likely (Haidt 2008).

This theoretical outlook, while centred on the "supply side" of issue prioritization, does not negate the agency of victim groups in attracting external support from humanitarian networks. The extent to which affected parties and their advocates frame causes to fit with what INGOs regard as desirable issue profiles will impact how officials prioritize their work (Bob 2005). A complete picture of issue selection must take account of such external dynamics. However, a prerequisite to understanding linkages between the activities of external constituencies and INGO behaviour is to shed light on how key actors within the latter bodies formulate preferences. It is on this element of issue selection that this project will primarily focus.

In terms of scope conditions, as noted the proposed theory aims to explain selection in light of the dramatic expansion of issue coverage by INGOs that took place in the post-Cold War period. It is therefore concerned with the ranking generational process during later steps in the decision-making sequence, that is, adjudication between particular issues once a diverse menu of options has been established. Conversely, psychological heuristics will be a less salient consideration for predicting big

[16] This issue is discussed in detail in Section 2.4.

shifts in the priorities of INGOs, such as how this expansion of issue coverage came about in the first instance. These shifts coincided with, and are more likely driven by, large-scale changes in the international system – e.g. when new political and geographic spaces opened up to INGOs in the 1990s –rather than the intuitive judgments of INGO officials. In addition, the theory is applicable to multi-mandate INGOs who face a multidimensional issue space, and whose officials have freedom to act on the basis of largely unrestricted funding. Single issue INGOs or those with a narrow mandate, for whom matters of cross-issue comparison do not arise, are outside the scope of the theory. As are groups that, in essence, act as conduits or implementation bodies for the preferences of donors, and whose funding is heavily restricted by outside actors, as decision-makers in these organizations lack the freedom to choose among candidate issues.

1.3 Methodological Approach

In terms of analytical strategy, to mitigate issues of aggregation and to provide a comprehensive examination of the proposed argument, the theory will be tested through the triangulation of evidence at two levels of analysis: the organizational and individual level. A Mixed-Method (MM) approach is applied encompassing both qualitative case studies and experimental analysis with INGO officials.

In the social sciences, MM may be defined as a system of research whereby "…the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry" (Tashakorri and Creswell 2007, p. 4). An MM approach is based on a pragmatic research logic. It recognizes that different methodological tools possess particular strengths and weaknesses and are each conducive to unearthing certain types of knowledge about the socio-political world. Due to the complexity of causal processes in global politics, there is growing consensus among political scientists that combining analytical tools can help to address research problems in a richer and more comprehensive manner than would otherwise be possible with a single method (Creswell et al. 2003, p. 159).

The study applies an *additional* MM strategy. In this sub-type, the researcher assigns different methods to discrete components of a unified project. The strengths of each method are connected to suitable sub-questions within an overall analytical framework. Each aspect of the design contributes a unique form of data. In terms of division of labour, a dominant-less-dominant model is used whereby the case studies represent the main body of empirics (see: Creswell 1994). The conjoint experiment is employed as a supplementary tool to augment findings from the core analysis. Whereas the case studies provide a contextualized understanding of the ranking generation process at the level of the organization, the conjoint experiment offers a causal test of the micro-foundational claims of the study's theory at the individual level. In this way, the qualitative elements of the design are complemented by the robust internal validity of the experiment, enhancing the external and ecological validity of findings and ameliorating the problem of aggregation[17] (Toshkov 2016, p. 188). In conjunction, both methods contribute to a comprehensive view of the determinants of issue selection across distinct levels of analysis.

Small-N Research and Case Selection

The case study approach may be defined as "…an intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units" (Gerring 2004, p. 341). While they may be conceived of in different ways – Gerring (2004, p. 346) argues that case studies are "best understood as an ideal-type rather than a method with hard-and-fast rules" – applications of the method tend to share a number of common characteristics. These include a focus on a single or small number of cases, collection of extensive and diverse empirical observations within each case, and "intensive reflection on the relationship between concrete empirical observations and abstract theoretical concepts" (Blatter and Haverland 2014, p. 19).

[17] The aggregation problem refers to the inconsistency of theoretical and empirical extrapolation of individually-grounded phenomena to decisional units at higher levels of analysis (Levy 1997, pp. 102-104). It is developed and discussed in more detail in section 2.4 of Chapter 2.

Case studies bring a number of analytical strengths to the project. First, small-N qualitative studies are amenable to conceptual validity and descriptive inferences. This is because qualitative work allows for detailed reflection and specification of concepts. As Blatter and Haverland (2014, p. 208) suggest, "one of the strong assets of case study research is that we can draw a detailed picture of the outcome or the cause of interest." The premium placed on causal analysis in political science has perhaps led this aspect of case studies to be undervalued, but it is an important benefit of the approach (Gerring 2004, p. 347). Second, the method is particularly adept at testing the internal validity and conditionality of causal arguments. Matters of time, institutional context, and interactions among causal factors may be salient for issue selection. Case study research is perhaps the optimal method to disentangle and detail the mechanics of conjunctive processes. Third, while case studies are well suited to generating and testing in-depth theoretical arguments within a narrowly-defined scope, a further advantage is their usefulness in deriving explanations with a broader applicability. In fact, "…small-N controlled comparison […] is often the foundation for externally valid claims" (Slater and Ziblatt 2013, p. 21). Finally, case studies allow for a pragmatic research ontology and epistemology. Rather than demarcating research programs based on paradigmatic disputes, case studies can account for multi-dimensional explanations and promote convergence between competing theoretical frameworks. This is an important benefit for interdisciplinary theorizing, as with the present study (Blatter and Haverland 2014, pp. 5-7).

The project examines three case studies of major humanitarian[18] INGOs: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Oxfam. Their selection serves a number of analytical purposes. Each case is a large INGOs with a broad remit and the capacity to work on a diverse set of human rights issues. Decision-makers therefore face recurring problems of selection. As "gatekeeper"

[18] A distinction may be drawn between humanitarian and human rights INGOs. While, practically speaking, there may be little to distinguish the nominal goals of these organizations, the latter typically validate their work through explicit reference to human rights precepts codified in international law, treaties, and other agreements. This said, in recent years both Amnesty and HRW have broadened their focus to more explicitly incorporate development issues, while Oxfam's work has come to exhibit a human rights-based logic. This convergence is reflective of the diffusion of a more holistic view of human rights and development among global INGOs, particularly since the early 1990s.

organizations[19] – large non-state bodies at the centre of the humanitarian movement – these INGOs wield "considerable influence over human rights standard setting, institutionalization, monitoring, and enforcement", as well as agenda-setting within their organizational field (Mertus 2010, p. 52). Investigating issue prioritization in AI and HRW can help us to understand downstream effects on the human rights network (Bob 2009, p. 6). This makes the findings particularly salient for policy discussion. In addition, the case selection ensures variation in organization structure and processes of policy formulation, factors that have been linked to INGO behaviour (Wong 2012). A comprehensive body of scholarship, most notably within sociology, has documented the effects of internal structure on numerous outcomes, including organizational survival, practices, and impact (see: Scott 2007). Amnesty is a mass membership-based organization,[20] with a broad mix of volunteers and professional staff and a complex mode of governance. HRW, on the other hand, is hierarchical, lacks a comparable membership base, and has a more streamlined decision-making structure. Oxfam International governance structure encompasses two international boards that include representatives from each affiliate body. However, in contrast to Amnesty and HRW, the national affiliates of Oxfam are largely autonomous in determining their own agenda.[21]

The three cases also exhibit variation in terms of mode of operation and substantive issue focus. The HRW model, for example, centres on producing factual reports and pressurizing governments, corporations, and international institutions to conform to human rights norms. Amnesty, utilizing its large base of members and volunteers, blends this kind of work with extensive campaigning activity, and has dedicated internal divisions for this purpose. Oxfam has, in recent years, shifted toward a model of rights-based development, and a significant portion of its work is also directed toward the practical implementation of emergency-response and development projects on the ground. Further, the work of Amnesty and HRW covers a large spectrum of human rights issues, with no obvious

[19] On the profile of these INGOs as gatekeepers, see: (Bob 2009; Mertus 2010).
[20] AI currently has more than 2 million members and supporters.
[21] Detailed information on the structures of each INGO is provided in the case studies.

substantive focus. Oxfam, on the other hand, has a more narrow thematic focus, with a particular emphasis on poverty and inequality in the developing world. It is plausible that these differences may affect issue prioritization in INGOs. For instance, one might anticipate that certain factors – such as site access, costs, and feasibility – are more salient in the issue ranking process for organizations that are orientated toward project implementation on the ground. Similarly, if an INGO is predisposed to working on issues that relate to a broad issue category, such as poverty alleviation, processes of decision-making may well differ from INGOs whose issue pool is much larger. Choosing cases that vary in their structure, mode of operation, and substantive focus allows for probing the study's argument in different institutional contexts and to explore how well it travels across them.

A further consideration is the social importance of the INGOs in question. The real-world policy consequences of issue ranking in gatekeeper organizations such as Amnesty, HRW, and Oxfam are considerable relative to smaller INGOs. Decisional outcomes therefore possess greater normative implications in these cases than possible alternatives, and their investigation may ultimately result in the identification of project deliverables that help to optimize real-world INGO decision-making.

Qualitative Data Generation

To provide a fine-grained, contextual understanding of issue selection in the three case studies, the project will apply Causal Process-Tracing (CPT) focused primarily in the period 2009-2019. CPT can be defined as "the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator" (Collier 2011, p. 823). The chosen approach is theory-testing CPT.[22] In this form of CPT, the presence and influence of particular causal mechanisms are hypothesized in advance and undergo empirical testing. As Beach and Pederson (2013, p. 11) outline, "the goal is to evaluate whether evidence shows that the hypothesized causal mechanism…was present and functioned as theorized." The ontological foundations of the

[22] Three main approaches to CPT can be identified: theory-testing, theory-building, and explaining-outcome. For discussion of each type see: Beach and Pederson (2013).

approach lie in a conditional and configurational view of causation (Blatter and Haverland 2014, p. 92).

With regard to operationalization, to promote uniformity of measurement an issue can be said to be selected – in the qualitative component of the study – once an INGO has chosen to adopt a policy specific to that issue, with the ultimate goal of engaging in advocacy work on the topic. For instance, if a regional or thematic division proposes that the INGO adopts a policy on an issue area, and this is signed off by the central organization, this would constitute issue selection, irrespective of whether the INGO has engaged in advocacy on the issue yet or not. The analysis will also focus on specific, substantive areas of human rights and development, rather than overarching categories. For instance, the project would be concerned with whether the rights of sex workers or other female labourers have been selected for attention or not, rather than the level of attention paid to the larger category of "women's rights". Similarly, it would seek to explain why certain aspects of children's rights are selected over others, but not the comparative prioritization of children's rights in general.

Prior research finds that practitioners in the humanitarian sector may evaluate issue selection differently, depending on whether they are evaluating selection in general or specific candidate issues (Carpenter et al. 2014, p. 459). Recognising this, the case studies first analyze the decision-making process and motivational logic that underpins general patterns of selection. Subsequently, the trajectory of a pair of positive and negative issues – from initial emergence to choice outcome – shall undergo empirical evaluation. An issue may be considered a negative case if it is within the remit of the INGO and not yet adopted, even if it was not on the radar of the organization. However, including this class of issue in the analysis would create particular analytical challenges. For instance, if the INGOs have not engaged with an issue at all there will be no decision-making residue (documentary evidence, staff testimony and so on) to examine. This would present difficulties in explaining why such an issue was not adopted. Moreover, because the remit of each INGO is now extremely broad, it would be troublesome to precisely circumscribe which issues constitute a negative

case and which are outside of their scope. Focusing the analysis on issues that were actively considered, appear to have a similar probability of adoption, and yet had opposing outcomes in terms of selection, helps to ameliorate these analytical problems.[23] For AI, the within-case analysis will focus on two issues pertaining to workers' rights, the decriminalization of sex work (positive case) and abuses in the textile industry (negative case). In HRW, issues under the theme of children's rights will be examined, attacks on education (positive case) and child sex trafficking (negative case).[24] With Oxfam, the analysis is centred on inequalities associated with climate change (positive case) and poverty in the UK (negative case). The within-case comparisons have also been chosen to promote consistency in thematic categorization between pairs to aid inferences about decision-making.

Data is gathered using semi-structured interviews, archival documents, policy statements, reports, memoirs, secondary literature, and internal material shared with the researcher. The interviews – the main source of primary data – are well-suited to examining motives of decision-makers, while situating them in their professional and organizational setting (Leech 2002; Berry 2002). Interview protocols were designed to ensure the main questions and probes were uniform across participants, and were conducive to testing both the proposed theory and competing accounts. The interviews took place in the offices of AI and HRW in London and New York between 2018-2020 and, when necessary, via online calls. Participants were chosen to elicit broad-based knowledge of selection.[25] They include current and former members of executive management, directors of thematic and regional divisions, policy impact officers, researchers, campaigners, strategic planners, policy advisors, and consultants, among other staff.[26]

[23] It should be acknowledged that this design choice involves an analytical trade-off. It is probable that issues which were actively considered by INGOs differ along particular dimensions than those issues which were not considered at all. This may lead to a certain level of selection bias. However, it appears this trade-off is worth making, given the greater analytical difficulties that would arise if the pool of negative issues included all issues that could hypothetically be selected. From a pragmatic perspective, it is unrealistic to circumscribe the boundaries of what issues are and are not in the hypothetical pool of negative issues. This approach also makes for a harder test of the theory.

[24] The paired comparisons were chosen inductively and to ensure thematic consistency within issue pairs.

[25] An anonymised list of interview participants is included in the appendices.

[26] My research design received ethical approval from the DPIR Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC). Ref No.: SSH_DPIR_C1A_18_019.

Experimental Analysis

To augment findings from the case studies, the project employs a conjoint survey experiment to examine the micro-foundations of the theory. A discrete choice and rating-based conjoint analysis will be employed to examine the prospective causal effects of cognitive heuristics on issue selection at the individual level, as well as factors associated with competing frameworks. Conjoint analysis involves the construction of multiple experimental manipulations within a survey design that pertain to factors of theoretical interest. This is conducive to eliciting stated subject preferences and examining how individuals make multidimensional choices (Hainmueller et al. 2015, p. 2395). Conjoint analysis is a powerful tool for causal inference as, unlike many other experimental designs, it allows the researcher to incorporate multiple treatments and simultaneously test a large number of competing hypotheses (see: Hainmueller et al. 2014).

A non-probability sample of 183 INGO workers active in the humanitarian sector constitutes the subject pool. The survey was fielded at the offices of Amnesty and HRW in two waves during 2019. Staff could participate using research tablets provided on-site by the researcher or via an email containing access instructions and a link to the survey, which was circulated among staff by INGO management. Sampling INGO workers helps to reduce relevant attributional differences[27] between subjects and the population of interest and therefore enhances transferability of findings (McDermott 2002, p. 32). Many experimental studies in political science and psychology rely on a narrow database, with samples drawn from student populations and opt-in online platforms. Nonrepresentative samples of this kind can hinder external validity, as respondents may differ from elite decision-makers in crucial ways. INGO decision-makers may have a high level of specialist expertise, years of experience in their field, and dispositional traits that set them apart from the general population. Inferences derived from nonrepresentative sampling strategies cannot easily be transposed to these

[27] Possible attributional differences between INGO workers and a non-representative sample include levels of experience and expertise, factors which may impact the hypothesized effects of heuristic-led judgement.

kinds of actors. As Linde and Vis (2017, p. 102) note in their study of politicians and prospect theory, much of the evidence linking experimental findings in psychology to elite political actors is inconclusive. By fielding the survey experiment with INGO practitioners directly, this study can make a much more plausible case for the external validity of its results (Druckman and Kam 2011). Of course, this does not negate issues of external validity entirely. By solely using participants recruited from human rights organizations, this may lead to particular biases in the data related to how these officials are trained to think about selection. Their practical and conceptual reference frames – e.g. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights treaties, and so on – may imbue practitioners with a particular sense of issue hierarchies that varies in the humanitarian sector more broadly. Recognizing this limitation, and the inherent difficulties in realizing representativeness on this dimension, on the whole fielding the survey with INGO decision-makers enhances its external validity, and the approach is novel in being the first experimental study of its kind to examine selection with practitioners.

Participants were presented with paired and fully-randomized hypothetical humanitarian scenarios which vary along several levels linked to issue attributes – or treatments – that are associated both with the hypotheses[28] and a number of competing theoretical explanations.[29] Causal effects are estimated through calculation of the Average Causal Marginal Effect (ACME), that is the average difference in probability of an issue being selected across two attribute values, taking an average across all potential combinations of the other attributes (see: Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014).

This component of the design provides a robust examination of competing micro-foundational claims surrounding INGO preferences. A controlled experimental setting, allowing for random assignment of treatments, is conducive to disentangling and assessing the micro-foundational

[28] Hypotheses for the experiment are outlined in Chapter 6. While the main empirics test the general effects of heuristics in the case studies, a hypothesis-testing framework is employed for the experiment.
[29] Further specifics of the design and fielding of the experiment, including issues of operationalization and measurement, are included in Chapter 6.

postulates of the paper's theory, and is well-suited to examining psychological mechanisms which may otherwise be difficult to isolate from confounding using observable data. Conjoint analysis, in particular, enables investigation of the relative causal importance of competing claims with a level of precision outside the capacity of alternative experimental designs.

1.4 Significance of the Study

A growing body of literature has recognised the important role of transnational and non-state actors in global politics. These actors have challenged the pre-eminence of states in an international system which now bears their hallmarks (Gill 1995; Evangelista 1999; Florini 1999; Burgerman 2001). As Risse (2002) notes, theories pertaining to the workings of contemporary international politics, absent an accounting of the influential role of transnational actors, are increasingly viewed by IR scholars as incomplete. This is particularly the case in relation to humanitarian politics; the proficiency of the activity of TANs and INGOs has seen them heralded as an "emerging second superpower", with the capacity and flexibility to protect human security where state and intergovernmental initiatives have not proved fruitful (Murdie 2014, p. 5). Although much has now been written regarding the implications of TAN behaviour for international politics, the early stages of the TAN advocacy process remains dramatically under-theorized. This project, in enhancing our understanding of issue selection by TANs and INGOs, focuses on this neglected area of inquiry and will contribute further knowledge to the research agenda on transnational actors in IR.

The study will make two central theoretical contributions to the literature on issue selection in humanitarian decision-making. First, the project will address a major shortcoming in current theoretical work through investigation of the cognitive processes which underpin patterns of issue selection in TANs. Failure to examine micro-foundational assumptions is a limitation of current models of issue selection. Approaches that emphasise the role of organizational self-interest and norms tend to rely on ontological assumptions to impute strategic and ideational motivations to

humanitarian actors without probing the validity of those assumptions. Failure to investigate the micro-foundations of ranking generation processes results in a significant theoretical problem. In the absence of empirical validation of the micro-foundations of existing theories, it is difficult to discern between the formation of actor preferences on one hand, and the outcome of processes of issue selection on the other. As a result, we do not know whether decision-makers select issues for attention due to the strategic or normative motivations which theorists have imputed to date, or if preferences emerge from an alternative underlying logic.

Although constructivist scholars have effectively traced patterns of humanitarian issue salience over time, they have been less adept at explaining selection among substantively distinct issues. For instance, Finnemore's (1996) work on humanitarian intervention and Barnett's (2011) history of humanitarianism provide an informed account of how humanitarian ideas – such as military intervention to protect human rights – gain traction over time. Yet, these studies do not shed light on why humanitarian actors concentrated their attention on particular kinds of issues and interventionist strategies. Engaging with the question of why alternative policy options attract less attention or are ignored is a key and overlooked element in our understanding of TAN behaviour. Accordingly, while the ontological bases of constructivist models, as well as those affirming the primacy of organizational self-interest, appear to render them unsuited to examining preference formation, the present study will contribute to extant literature in explicitly investigating the micro-foundations of issue selection.

Extending from this, the project's second theoretical contribution is in its imputation of an alternative micro-foundational basis of TAN behaviour. Here, the study advances the claim that micro-foundations related to organizational self-interest – such as the maximization of material and reputational gains –are not those which drive issue selection. TAN behaviour may be best understood by imputing nonstandard preferences derived from psychological findings in behaviour decision research, rather than the motivational assumptions surrounding utility maximization. In addition, the thesis suggests that the imputation of nonstandard preferences based on the psychology

of heuristics can help to overcome limitations in constructivist theories focused on norms, therein building on current models in a complementary fashion. Heuristics can help decision-makers to connect a general orientation toward doing good and reducing harm to actual issue choices from candidate options. The study therefore not only raises question marks over extant micro-foundational assumptions in models of issue selection, it puts forward an alternative theoretical framework to account for decisional outcomes, generating novel predictions about the patterns of issue selection which will be observed empirically.

In terms of methodology, the thesis' mixed-methodological approach is innovative. Political scientists have begun to recognise the utility of incorporating experiments into research designs which encompass complementary methodological tools that alleviate problems of external validity (McDermott 2002, pp. 56-57). Yet, in comparison to fields such as behavioural economics, the method has yet to diffuse in a significant way to IR scholarship. Through combining experimental analysis of micro-level phenomena with qualitative case studies of large humanitarian organizations, the present study benefits from the advantages of experiments while allaying concerns regarding external validity. The project shall therefore provide a useful methodological template for IR scholars who wish to incorporate experiments in their own research designs.

The findings of this research project will also have implications beyond its immediate scope. The study will be of more general use for scholars seeking to understand the role of psychological processes in political, organizational, and network-based decision-making. Moreover, gaining an understanding of the manner in which the cognitive perception[30] of issues affects issue selection by TANs may provide useful insights for scholars engaged in on-going debates concerning the role of media effects in political judgement formation in respect of humanitarian issues (see: Jakobsen 1996;

[30] There is some disagreement in the cognitive psychology literature concerning the level of interrelation between human cognition and perception, and how these concepts may be demarcated (for a summative analysis of this debate see: Firestone and Scholl 2015). While acknowledging this interrelationship, in this study the term cognitive perception (as distinct from sensory perception) is specifically used to refer to the mental mechanisms of information processing, reasoning, application of knowledge, memory, and problem-solving which become operative once new information has initially undergone sensory perception.

Livingston 1997; Robinson 2000). In addition, the project aims to contribute to a broader debate concerning why issues gain traction and norms emerge in international politics. Failure to provide a convincing account of norm emergence is a criticism which has typically been levelled at constructivist IR scholars. This research agenda may be usefully augmented through investigation of TANs, with issue selection a logically preceding step to norm emergence (see: Goldgeier and Tetlock 2001; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

1.5 Thesis Structure

The remainder of the study is divided into six chapters. In Chapter Two the paper's theoretical framework is delineated. It evaluates the existing literature on issue selection in TANs and identifies its limitations. A novel theoretical explanation for issue selection grounded in behaviour decision research is presented, and its observable implications specified. Chapters Three, Four, and Five are dedicated to each of the case studies. Chapter Six elaborates on the design and fielding of the conjoint survey, before presenting and interpreting the experimental results. Chapter Seven will collate the overall findings of the experiment and case studies, reflect on the implications for the study's theory, and conclude by setting out a number of pathways for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter the paper's theoretical framework shall be outlined. The chapter proceeds in a series of four steps. First, the precise meaning of a number of the study's central concepts will be delimited, including transnational advocacy networks, INGOs, and humanitarian issues. Second, the chapter provides a critical evaluation of the existing literature on issue selection. An alternative approach grounded in political psychology will then be advanced and, based on this theory, observable implications outlined for empirical testing. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the aggregation problem and its implications for this study.

2.1 Conceptualizing TANs, INGOs, and Humanitarian Issues

Prior outlining the study's theory, it is first necessary to delimit with more precision three of the paper's key concepts: 1) transnational advocacy networks 2) international non-governmental organizations and 3) humanitarian issues. First, a transnational advocacy network shall be taken to refer to distinct non-state actors that work internationally and collaboratively on a given issue or set of issues of mutual concern. Members of TANs are linked together through shared values, discourse, and exchanges of information and resources. (Keck and Sikkink 1999, p. 89). Typically, advocacy networks are informal constellations of individuals and organizations which participate in the collective mobilization of information, pressure, and resources across different social, political, and legal settings as a means to maximize efficacy in pursuit of their advocacy agenda. Mobilizing across borders and through multiple platforms is conducive to the construction of more effective campaigns that help bring about and maximize desired outcomes (Trubek et al. 2000, pp. 1194-1195). TANs may include domestic and international NGOs, intellectuals, academics, journalists, international organizations, and major human rights groups.

The network which emerged around the issue of violence against women, as documented by Keck and Sikkink (1999), illustrates the TAN phenomenon. Building on longstanding issues in the

women's movement, such as universal suffrage and discrimination, the issue of violence against women possessed little international traction up until the 1970s. The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, contained no reference to gender-based violence. Heretofore activism and awareness of gendered violence remained a largely localised issue. Growing out of work by new groups such as the Women's International Network, founded in 1975, the First International Tribune on Crimes against Women in 1976, coalitions of women's groups which mobilized globally on women and development, as well as a series of meetings at the UN in these years, various single issues such as female genital mutilation, domestic abuse, and sexual slavery gradually became connected under the wider rubric of violence against women. By the 1985 UN Nairobi Conference, the subject of violence against women had begun to influence official UN agendas. Subsequently, regional commemorative work for women who suffered violent deaths in Latin America contributed to the emergence of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, a large scale global campaign in 1991 which linked the abuse of women to a denial of their human rights. These efforts culminated in violence against women constituting the single most important topic of international discussion on women's issues by the mid-1990s, occupying centre-stage at the UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (see: Keck and Sikkink 1999, pp. 165-180).

This truncated history of the growth of violence against women as an issue of international concern exemplifies how disparate groups of actors at the local, national, regional, and international level may over time coalesce into a transnational network around a shared area of concern and exert a marked influence over public affairs. The importance of advocacy networks has grown sharply in recent decades, obscuring longstanding relational boundaries between the state, citizen, and their respective recourse to international bodies. Situated outside of traditional understandings of international politics and primarily informed by normative rather than self-interested or material considerations, IR scholars have only begun to pay due attention to TANs as key players in the discussion and formulation of policy at the regional, national, and international level (Keck and Sikkink 1999, p. 89).

Second, despite scholars recognizing INGOs as notable actors in international politics, an agreed classification of this concept remains elusive. Two major approaches to this question can be differentiated. On one hand the juridical approach emphasises the legal status of non-governmental bodies both in terms of domestic state and international law. Alternatively the sociological perspective, the prism through which INGOS will be understood in the present study, seeks to understand INGOs through their constituent parts and function when engaged in transnational political activity (Martens 2002, p. 271). The term INGOs shall refer to non-governmental organizations formed through voluntary or non-voluntary associations that are self-governing, whose work and organizational reach is international in scope, and which are non-profit in orientation. Their operations may be diverse, potentially covering a wide spectrum of social and administrative problems. Following Vakil (2007, p. 2063), INGO activity may be broadly categorized into six dimensions: development, service delivery, education, research, advocacy, and networking. As Keck and Sikkink (1998, p. 92) affirm, INGOs are central actors within TANs. They are prominent and influential allies for domestic groups seeking to alter government policy (Murdie and Bhasin 2011, p. 164), aid in the legitimization and certification of humanitarian causes, and play a critical role in setting advocacy agendas of networks (Bob 2008).

In addition, given its analytical treatment as a distinct concept, the concept of a humanitarian issue[31] necessitates differentiation from closely related concepts such humanitarian problems, campaigns, and norms. A humanitarian problem denotes an existing grievance which has yet to undergo

[31] While Keck and Sikkink (1998; 1999) and Carpenter's (2007) application of the concept of a humanitarian issue provides a useful working definition for this study, a number of political scientists and historians have very recently begun to recognise the temporally-bound and historically contingent nature of this view of humanitarianism and human rights, which to a large extent reflects a specific conjuncture in the post-Cold War period. As a result of this, most studies of humanitarian politics have been confined within a two decade post-Cold War setting. Barnett's (2011) survey of humanitarian history, on the other hand, traces the contemporary evolution of humanitarianism to the early nineteenth century. Similar work, which seeks out parallels in the historical development and contemporary workings of humanitarian politics, such as Bass (2008), Simms and Trim (2011), and Rodogno (2011) all make contributions in adding to our understanding of the temporal and pluralistic linkages between past and present. However, as Green (2014) notes, this literature is in some facets problematic. In reading history backwards from contemporary humanitarian constructs and normative and legal frameworks, teleological and presentist accounts may serve to obscure both the true origins and evolutions of human rights within a particular contextual environment and the implications for contemporary research in this field concerning how far findings may be generalized across time and space.

systematic identification and definition by local or transnational humanitarian actors (Carpenter 2007, p. 102). Humanitarian problems thus can also be conceptually understood as an underlying condition for issue emergence (Bob 2009, p. 1). Campaigns, on the other hand, signify concerted attempts by transnational actors or states to elicit particular policy changes on a given problem or issue. Humanitarian issues themselves arise when humanitarian actors specify a humanitarian problem to constitute a distinct area of human rights protection and which may be subsequently referenced in the advocacy agendas of states, international institutions, or humanitarian organizations (Carpenter 2007, p. 102). This is conceptually distinct from norms, which may be defined as "a set of intersubjective understandings readily apparent to actors that makes behavioural claims on those actors" (Finnemore, 1994, p. 2). Inherent to this definition is its normative implication of how actors ought to behave, and the capacity of norms to potentially shape actors' preferences and behaviour (Florini 1996, p. 364). Issues may thus stand prior to norms, albeit having the potential to attain the status of a norm; humanitarian issues and norms may overlap depending on whether an issue has achieved a sufficient level of intersubjective agreement on the appropriateness of a set of expected behaviours concerning that issue. An important signifier of this status is codification in international legal covenants and agreement among UN bodies and human rights organizations that an issue is within the purview international human rights law.

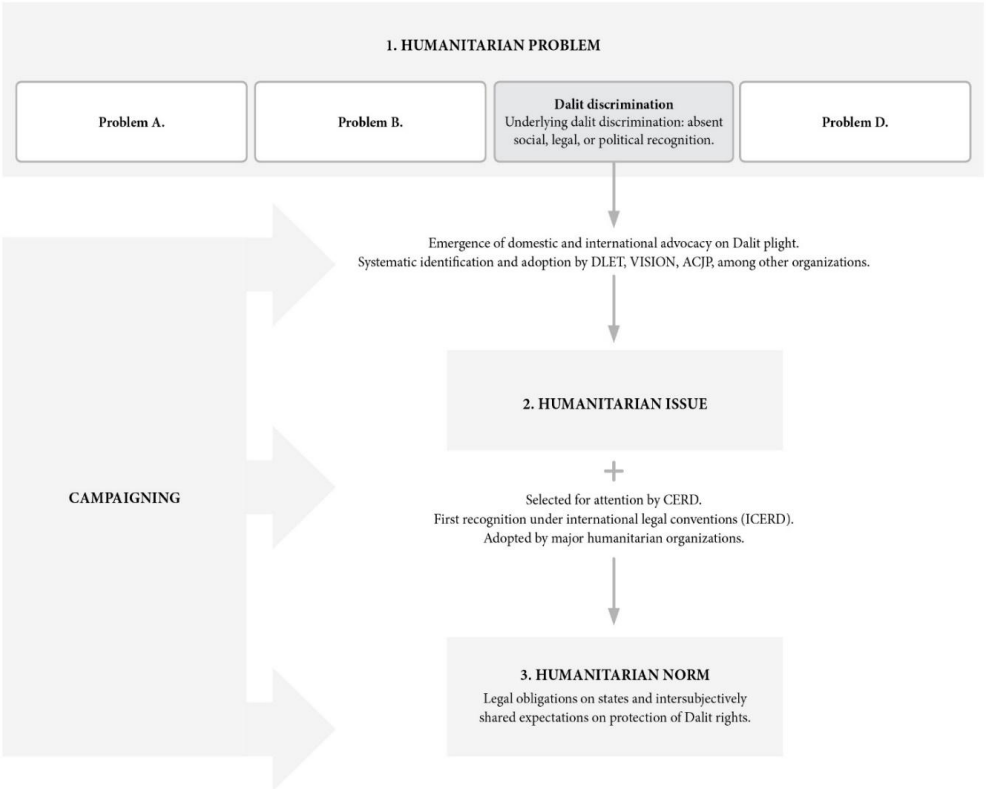
The plight of Indian Dalits, or the Untouchables, provides an instructive illustration of how the aforementioned concepts, humanitarian problems, campaigns, issues, and norms, may be distinguished. As Bob (2008, pp. 30-51) has recounted, the Dalit population of India, numbering well over 150 million, have been interminable victims of caste-base discrimination, with millions suffering routine violence and abuse. Prior to the 1990s their situation remained outside the scope of human rights bodies, failing to achieve recognition by the United Nations or major INGOs. The issue was not specified in any international conventions, regarded as a breach of human rights, or adopted as a site of agitation by humanitarian organizations. Absent recognition by humanitarian actors the treatment of Dalits, at this juncture, therefore may best be understood as an underlying humanitarian

problem. Sustained domestic and international activism in the early 1980s then sought to formulate caste-based discrimination as a human rights issue. In the 1980s and the early part of the 1990s this agenda was pursued primarily under the auspice of three organizations, the Dalit Liberation Education Trust (DLET), Volunteers in Service to India's Oppressed and Neglected (VISION), and the Ambedkar Center for Justice and Peace (ACJP). Despite the largely fruitless nature of this work, with Dalit representatives unable to gain official recognition from UN bodies or large human rights groups, this was an important step in the development of Dalit claims. The problem of discrimination against Dalits had now undergone systematic identification and articulation, and was therein transfigured into a humanitarian issue which Dalit organizations were now lobbying on behalf of.

The Dalit campaign for recognition reached a major turning point in 1996, when UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) affirmed that caste-based discrimination was covered under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). In 1998 the First World Dalit Convention was held in Malaysia and in the aftermath an international solidarity network was founded on the issue. On the back of CERD's decision, in 1997 HRW commissioned a major report on caste discrimination. The report, entitled *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's "Untouchables"*, was released in 1999 (Narula 1999). In ensuing years the Dalit cause has progressed rapidly and solidified legal recognition. In 2000 a resolution by the UN Human Rights Commission's Sub-commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights stated that work and descent as a source of discrimination was inconsistent with international human rights law. The Goonesekere Report, issued by the sub-commission the following year, specifically cited caste-based discrimination in India as in breach of human rights law. Therefore, although caste-based discrimination remains prevalent in India and elsewhere, the cause of the Dalits now has the backing of major human rights actors and their protection is seen as enshrined in human rights law.

The Dalit case demonstrates how the presence of an underlying problem can be transformed by activist organizations into a humanitarian issue, and how an issue can gain sufficient traction among international organizations and bodies to constitute a norm which confers legal obligations and expectations concerning how states must treat their citizens (Bob 2008, pp. 30-51). A visual overview of the transition of the Dalit cause from underlying humanitarian problem to accepted norm is presented in Figure 1. It is TAN decision-making and prioritization in relation to phenomena at the latter two stages in this process, when a humanitarian problem has been established as an issue of human rights concern, as well those issues which achieve the status of norms, which is the focus of this study.

Figure 1. Overview of transition of Dalit discrimination from humanitarian problem to humanitarian norm.



2.2 Theorizing Humanitarian Decision-Making

The study of INGOs may be broadly categorized into two schools of thought. One framework suggests INGO behaviour is primarily driven by instrumental motives related to incentive structures in their operational environment. INGOs operate amid high levels of "organizational insecurity, competitive pressures, and fiscal uncertainty" (Cooley and Ron 2002, p. 6). Proliferation in the number of active INGOs, as well as the marketization of the human rights sector – INGOs must compete for contracts and funding opportunities – heighten organizational insecurity and undermine efficiency. According to this perspective, selectivity in the tackling of human rights issues may result from a strategic calculus, inclusive of materialist incentives and related factors, such as group reputation (Cooley and Ron 2002, p. 5-6; Aldashev and Verdier 2010). In comparison, another school regards INGOs as broadly principled actors, arguing that perceptions of their interests are shaped by the normative context in which those actors operate. Officials respond to what they view as a legitimate course of action in a given context, and issue selection may be motivated by shared values within advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1999, p. 98-99; Carpenter 2007).[32]

Advocates of both of these perspectives have produced a large number of studies which examine the proposed causal relationship between factors such as material or strategic self-interest, audience costs, transnational advocacy, human rights norms, and policy outcomes among state and non-state actors. These studies have employed diverse methods, including large-N statistical analyses and small-N comparative or single case studies (Hawkins 2004; Cardenas 2007; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2007; Lebovic and Voeten 2009; Simmons 2009; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 2013). However, existing theoretical scholarship on the politics of humanitarian decision-making neglects critical early steps in the developmental chain of humanitarian advocacy. There is a paucity of theoretical and empirical investigations concerning why TANs tend to select some issues for attention in their advocacy agenda over others. Instead, current literature in the field typically seeks to address questions

[32] Of course, not all perspectives or frameworks are as neatly separable of this, and scholars may incorporate insights from both of these schools of thought in their analyses of INGOs.

pertaining to items which are already prominent on advocacy agendas, situates states as the key actors, and, rather than theorizing selection between different issues, investigates the factors and processes which lead to the prioritization of certain cases of a specific issue (Carpenter 2007, p. 101).

The literature on humanitarian intervention is an instructive example. In explaining selectivity in the application of humanitarian intervention between cases, rationalists of various stripes have emphasised factors such as perceptions of threats to the national interest and security, refugee flows and territorial integrity, terrorism, the assertion or enhancement of relative international power, as well as economic and trade incentives (Gibbs 1991; Finnemore 1996; Posen and Ross 1997; Gegout 2005). Conversely, scholars in the constructivist camp have argued that variation in military intervention witnessed heretofore do not conform to the interests highlighted by rationalists. They posit that shared normative principles at the international level, which have become increasingly salient for state decision-makers in the post-Cold War era, have primarily shaped states' interventionist strategies (Finnemore 1996; Bellamy 2005). While scholarship in this area is well-developed, has employed diverse methodological tools, and has stimulated a sophisticated normative debate on the ethical, political, and legal dilemmas associated with humanitarian intervention, its theoretical and empirical scope has largely been restricted to examining why this doctrine has been employed in some particular cases and not in others (Holzgrefe and Keohane 2003; Welsh 2003; Hehir 2009; Murray 2013). While scholars may ask why NATO intervened in Kosovo or Libya and not elsewhere, they rarely broach the question of how decision-makers rank the importance of substantively different humanitarian issues in making such a determination. This limitation is manifest in related literatures, such as on the deployment of peacekeepers. A well-developed literature has seen competing rationalist and constructivist explanations for why peacekeepers are deployed in particular civil war situations by states and multilateral organizations (Neack 1995; De Jonge Oudraat 1996; Gilligan and Stedman 2003; Townsen and Reeder 2014). However, how decision-makers select between distinct issue areas has received no systematic theoretical or empirical attention in this work.

An additional cluster of studies, which more directly examines the work of TANs, has sought to illuminate the factors and conditions which determine the success of campaigns to enact policy change among states once an issue has been adopted into advocacy agendas. Some have suggested that campaigns are more likely to be successful if actors strategically frame them to targeted audiences (Price 1998). Others emphasise realistic policy goals, consistent pressure of domestic and transnational activists, and the adoption of issues by major INGOs, in campaign success (Burgerman 2001; Bob 2008). Again, however, a limitation of this literature is that it exclusively deals with latter steps in the advocacy chain. In focusing on matters of campaign efficacy, the crucial prior question of why TANs choose to focus their resources on some issues and not others is neglected.

Work on agenda-setting in the media and communications literature also fails to offer a plausible explanatory framework for issue selection in TANs. A number of studies in this field highlight a correlation between media coverage and various spheres of public policymaking (McCombs and Shaw 1993; Dearing and Rogers, 1996; Ghanem, 1996). Political scientists have also adopted agenda-setting models in an effort to explain how political actors such as states, parliaments, and bureaucracies formulate their priorities, adjudicate among different potential issues, and reach a policy position on a given set of topics (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge, 1994). Some theorists emphasise the role of media coverage in influencing policy behaviour through the mobilization of powerful constituencies who have an interest in the issue, while constructivists have posited that media coverage may be a driver of political agendas when the issue being highlighted fits with cultural frames familiar to decision-makers, the public, and other key audiences. While few scholars doubt the potential of the media to elevate particular cases into the public square, and therein to heighten the possibility of issue prioritization, over the past 15 years empirical studies have cast doubt on how determinant this relationship is. A large number of studies have produced mixed or contradictory results, and for those investigations which have returned a positive relationship between media coverage and policy prioritization, concerns over endogeneity remain unresolved (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006).

IR scholars have not engaged with issue selection as an area of systematic inquiry. We lack a well-developed explanatory theory of the ranking generating process in INGOs and TANs. One prospective reason for this failure is an underlying assumption common to dominant models. Due to their ontological commitments, existing studies tend to assume certain logics of selection, rather than probing micro-foundations. This assumption does not adequately discern between the formation of actor preferences and the outcome of processes of issue selection. The ontological basis of existing models may therefore have rendered them unsuited to deciphering the actual ranking generating process and mechanisms which underpin issue selection. Whatever its origin, the result has been a failure to directly tackle or provide a coherent account of the determinants issue selection, meaning the subject has been almost exclusively been alluded to in a tentative and implicit manner.

In her work, Carpenter (2007) distils implicit theoretical suppositions on issue prioritization from Keck and Sikkink's (1998) research on the impact of TANs on international and regional politics. Keck and Sikkink identify a number of issue and actor characteristics which appear to have a positive effect on the likelihood of TAN efficacy in influencing state policy. Carpenter (2007, p.100) subsequently applies and empirically evaluates these theoretical insights, as well as those of Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), Price (1998) and Florini (1996), in terms of their explanatory power regarding the initial process of TAN issue selection. In relation to issue characteristics, if an issue involves instances of bodily harm to innocent or vulnerable people, exudes a clear causal chain of blame to individual or small groups of actors, or pertains to cases of legal inequity, such issues are hypothesized to be more likely to receive attention. Further, issues will be more likely to be prioritized by humanitarian actors if they fit well with pre-existing taboos and domestic and international normative agendas. Carpenter also utilized this literature to hypothesize that issues which attract the activism of individual political entrepreneurs, especially when those actors achieve a high degree of visibility through media exposure, are more likely to be selected for attention than those which do not (Carpenter 2007, pp. 110-112).

Having distilled these implicit hypotheses Carpenter then tested their empirical validity, examining a set of issues, including child soldiers, girls in war, and children born from wartime rape, within the broader genus of Children affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC). Carrying out a qualitative content analysis of online data from thirty major advocacy organizations, Carpenter found that the patterns of prioritization of CAAC issues were inexplicable in terms of the aforementioned factors. Despite children born of wartime rape being especially vulnerable to abuse, disease, and stigmatization, as well as fitting within established humanitarian agendas and normative frameworks,[33] their cause is absent from advocacy agendas surrounding children affected by conflict. While girls in war has attracted a moderate level of attention, child soldiers were shown to be the single most prominent issue among advocates for children in war. Unexpectedly, child soldiers garnered more attention than categories such as children at risk of physical attack or being killed (Carpenter 2007, p. 108). Current explanatory hypotheses therefore seem inadequate in accounting for variation in the issues which are selected for attention by transnational actors. Simply put, Carpenter finds that many of the factors highlighted in prior studies – issue attributes, extant norm agendas, the influence of political entrepreneurs, and identifiable causal chains – may "co-occur" with cases of non-selection, suggesting "such explanations are insufficient theoretically" (Carpenter 2007, p. 100).

In light of the above discussion, a number of theoretical and empirical limitations in the existing literature on issue selection in INGOs and advocacy networks may be noted. Although quite an extensive theoretical and empirical literature has developed concerning the prospective links between TAN advocacy and regional and international policy, there is a dearth of theoretical work dealing specifically with the early stages of humanitarian advocacy. The crucial step from the initial definition of an underlying humanitarian problem as a distinct area of humanitarian concern to its adoption by

[33] Bob's (2005) work on third world insurgent groups also suggests INGOs are responsive to issues when framed in terms of existing agendas. However, while Bob finds - quite intuitively - that insurgent groups are more likely to garner support when they frame their plight in particular ways, Carpenter's work casts doubt on whether this kind of market-orientated, self-interested modelling can provide a generalizable explanation for issue ranking in INGOs or TANs. Furthermore, a general theory of issue selection also requires more attention to the supply-side of the equation, and how it is that decision-makers come to establish desirable issue profiles among a host of potential options.

decision-makers remains nebulous. Similarly, much of the literature on humanitarian decision-making, such as that on humanitarian intervention and peacekeeping, situates states as the key actors and seeks to explain variation in case selection within a given issue type, rather than theorizing adjudication between issues. Failure to directly address the question of issue selection has resulted in the derivation of implicit hypothesis from related literatures, such as that on TAN efficacy in enacting changes in domestic state policy. However, initial empirical evaluation has found little support for these hypotheses, suggesting that existing explanations are inadequate in accounting for observed patterns of issue selection by TANs.

2.3 The Political Psychology of Issue Selection

This study will advance an alternative explanation for issue prioritization by adopting insights from theoretical and experimental work in behavioural decision research. A central lesson of this literature is that assumptions of rationality in human decision-making, or indeed the analytical approximation of behaviour as rational in theoretical models – including in this instance consistent adherence to shared normative precepts by TANs – are unrealistic and misguided. The psychological mechanisms which shape human decision-making exhibit regularities of deviation from rationalist assumptions which are both systematic and predictable (Hafner-Burton, Hughes, and Victor 2003, p. 368). The principal insight which will be developed and tested in this study is that, while material incentives and ideational commitments are causally relevant, it is the cognitive perception of humanitarian issues by transnational actors that may best explain variation in issue adoption.

In line with much of the literature, this study supposes that INGOs – in part through processes of industry self-selection – are generally principled actors motivated to lessen human harm (Felin and Foss 2005: 450).[34] To achieve their goals, decision-makers face complex dilemmas in identifying

[34] This is in line with much of the literature. It does not preclude INGOs from engaging in self-interested behaviour. INGOs are not immune from the exigencies of a competitive sector. Motives to lessen human harm may also relate to more instrumental assessments, such as concerns for reputation and support. INGOs will embody such traits to varying degrees, and some are more principled than others. Murdie 2014.

priorities from available issue options. Since the 1990s, human rights coverage has expanded and INGOs active in the sector, having once focused narrowly on civil and political rights, have an increasingly broad area of responsibility. Issues such as economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights, health, the environment, corporate responsibility, women's rights, and LGBT rights, among others, are now viewed as falling within the remit of human rights frameworks. The menu of options available for selection by INGO officials therefore contains issues that are substantively very different, making it difficult to determine which areas should be prioritized.[35] Further complicating matters, INGOs typically subscribe to the indivisibility of human rights, viewing them as interconnected and mutually sustaining. In Tetlock et al.'s typology, INGO officials face "tragic" trade-offs where "sacred values" – in this case human rights – are pitched against each other (Tetlock et al. 2000). Even if well-intentioned, decision-makers face onerous ethical choices, lacking objective criteria to evaluate the relative importance of issues. The theory posits that INGO officials resolve this dilemma by using a set of cognitive heuristics – the availability, representative, and affect heuristics – to arrive at choice outcomes.

We may pause here to clarify how the proposed argument about heuristics relates to the existing schools of thought on selection. In terms of explanations that emphasise financial and competitive pressures in INGOs' operational environments, and which posit organizational self-interest as a primary driver of outcomes, it is my contention that such explanations match poorly with empirically observed patterns of selection. Put differently, the account of heuristic-led judgment advanced in the thesis seeks to provide a more accurate account of why INGO officials tend to focus attention on some issues over others, while viewing explanations based on organizational self-interest as ill-equipped in doing so. As the case of Amnesty International's adoption of the decriminalization of sex work, presented in the introduction, attests – by no means an isolated example – INGOs seem willing to select issues that contravene their own self-interest. Selection appears to adhere to an

[35] Although issue categories may be divided thematically within organizational structures, ordinarily there are large overlaps and intersections in issues both within and between these teams. At a regional level, in particular, officials are typically required to assess options for selection across and within overarching issue categories.

alternative motivational logic. Theoretical arguments grounded in the idea that selection choices by INGOs are responsive to organizational self-interest are therefore viewed as competing explanations.

Conversely, I do not view the heuristic-based account as incompatible with extant theories in the constructivist tradition. Rather, I see constructivist explanations which focus on the role of norms in selection outcomes as incomplete, ultimately being unable to explain officials' preferences absent an appeal to heuristics. As noted above, the proposed heuristic-based account posits that INGOs are, by and large, principled actors motivated to lessen harm. Their general orientation and aim to lessen harm is likely informed by norms in the INGO environment which shape how officials perceive interests, a standpoint consistent with constructivist arguments in this research programme heretofore. However, I claim that this general normative impulse is insufficient to allow officials to adjudicate between a vast menu of substantively diverse issue areas, each with potential claims on INGO attention. Heuristics can help officials to bridge the gap between the complex ethical choices that arise due to the selection dilemma faced by decision-makers – one based in part on normative convictions – and actual choice outcomes. In this sense, the theory advanced in the thesis may be viewed as complementary to constructivist arguments in the literature, rather than contradicting them.

Prior to explicating how heuristics can help officials to choose among issue items, we may dwell for a moment on the nature of the selection dilemma, including the nature of its emergence and its relationship to the theory. As a preliminary step, we may first note an important scope condition for the theory, which speaks to the decisional environment in which key officials are situated; that is, INGOs must pursue a multi-mandate agenda. INGOs that are organized around a single-issue area, or a small set of issues that are thematically proximate – for example, INGOs that work on a particular area of healthcare or specific aspect of children's rights – fall outside the scope of the theory. Rather, for the selection dilemma to arise, decision-makers must be faced with a menu of options that traverse different substantive areas of human protection. This is a key condition, as it is the substantive difference between issue options which generates a dilemma in terms of issue

ordering. Whereas single issue INGOs, or those with a highly constrained mandate within an issue area, will not encounter serious questions of cross-issue selection, such challenges may manifest for those who must set priorities within a multidimensional issue space.

A further scope condition concerns the freedom of officials to set the INGO agenda. If alternative actors, in particular donor bodies and networks, primarily decide where the organization's attention is focused, or constrain officials to a narrow set of options, this would preclude the emergence of a selection dilemma. This is because a central feature of the dilemma, such as the necessity to choose between a significant list of diverse issue areas, would not be present. For selection problems to arise INGO officials must be free to act. INGOs that, in essence, operate on the basis of restricted funding – revenue whose purpose is circumscribed by the donor – and function as implementation arms or conduits for the preferences of outside actors, are outside the scope of the theory.

In light of these conditions, two additional matters require further specification. These are the character of the normative orientation which guides INGO behaviour, as well as the role of information in the theory. We have already noted that, in the proposed framework, INGOs are supposed as principled actors who are motivated by a normative impulse to do good and lessen harm. How does this relate to the selection dilemma? I posit that it is this broad normative conviction, which is ambiguous in relation to the ordering of preferences, coupled with INGOs' multidimensional issue space, which creates a dilemma. When faced with issue types as diverse as freedom of expression, gender rights, the environment, the provision of emergency relief, corporate accountability, among many other options, a normative impulse to help others is insufficient to generate issue rankings. The absence of clear, ordered preferences on the part of decision-makers creates a selection challenge when setting the agenda. It may be further remarked that the normative motives of INGOs – for those that meet the scope conditions outlined above – may be regarded as generally ambiguous. Even an apparently more specific normative orientation, such as around harm reduction, would be insufficient to avoid the selection dilemma, due to the substantive difference between issue areas and associated difficulties in assessing harm. Of course, if an INGO focused in

one area, say emergency medical relief in the aftermath of natural disasters, the normative impulse driving their work may be less ambiguous. It is possible, for example, that a donor or founder has a more clearly delineated normative agenda, which is channelled through the INGO's work. However, as noted, such phenomena are outside the purview of the theory, as their circumstances are quite distinct from those of multi-mandate groups. This said, although we may regard the normative motives of multi-mandate INGOs to do good as ambiguous in general, there may be conditions under which the dilemma is exacerbated. Among the groups that must select from multiple issues, we may, for example, surmise that the wider the remit of INGOs in terms of substantively different issue areas, the worse the problem of selection is likely to be. This does not establish a new selection problem – the fundamental features of which are already in place – but merely adds to the complexity of the issue space faced by officials.

Extending from this latter point, we may consider the role of information in the selection dilemma which, again, may exacerbate the problem but is not crucial to its emergence. Information in this context may relate to organizational monitoring – e.g. examining the scope and severity of human suffering in an issue area – or learning from past INGO activities. As valuable as this information may appear to be, it does not alter the central characteristics of the dilemma. For example, even if we are aware that X number of people have been jailed due to an unfair trial, Y number of indigenous people are negatively affected by the use of pesticides on nearby farmland, and Z number of people suffer from a lack of disability rights in the workplace (and so on), and that INGOs can make predictions on how these numbers will be affected by their activities – information that, in reality, INGOs will not possess, not least because conditions and consequences in the future cannot be foreseen – this information would not clarify the ranking of preferences. This is because the problem is not one of merely calculating utility, but one of preference order in the first instance. A lack of information may make their activities more difficult – not knowing the effect of previous INGO actions across issues, as well as who is affected by what problem, and to what degree, will not help

matters – but it is not essential to the dilemma facing INGOs, and the need to establish preferences from a diverse menu of issue options.

Although political scientists have long utilized insights from cognitive psychology and behavioural economics, recent advances in these fields have seen the elaboration and experimental validation of theories which have moved well beyond classical ideas such as bounded rationality (Simon 1955). Previous obstacles to the diffusion of psychological research have abated, with a wave of experimental research deepening our understanding of models of cognition. This process has seen the identification of specified maps of bounded rationality, as well as scope conditions for the operation of bias in judgement formation and decision-making outcomes (Stein 2017, p. 250). Broad consensus now exists among psychologists on a two-level model of cognition, where choice may result from either a fast, intuitive response to a situation or problem or a slower, more deliberative process of reasoning[36] (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017, p. S2-3).

Cognitive heuristics may be defined as mental shortcuts or "rules of thumb" which inform and help resolve decisional problems, often with incomplete information (Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982). Kahneman and Frederick's (2002) re-formulation of the phenomena, since its original elucidation in the 1970s, suggests cognitive tasks are performed via heuristics through a process of attribute substitution. The process occurs when an "…individual assesses a specified *target attribute* of a judgment object by substituting another property of that object— the *heuristic attribute* —which comes more readily to mind" (Kahneman and Frederick 2002, p.53). In terms of selection, heuristics may help officials perform a number of analytical and decisional tasks. These include (1) categorizing the nature of an issue; (2) evaluating the moral stakes and potential for harm; (3) assessing risks and rewards of issue options; and, as a consequence, (4) determining on what issue the INGO should focus. Heuristics seem particularly salient for selection problems and resolving the ethical dilemma

[36] This conceptual model of contrasting cognitive systems is taken from Stanovich and West (2002). This stylized dual-process model does not infer autonomy between systems, but provides convenient labels for describing outcomes arrived at through cognitive processes which can generally be distinguished by their speed, controllability, and contents (Kahneman and Frederick 2002, p. 267).

they give rise to. Findings in the psychology of moral judgment suggest moral action is weakly correlated to moral reasoning, with preference formation more tightly linked to intuitive feeling and judgment. What appears to be the product of careful deliberation is commonly an intuitive judgment to which post-hoc rationalizations are attached. Under conditions of moral complexity and in the absence of clear comparative metrics – as is the case with selection decisions – the use of heuristics is especially likely (Haidt 2008). Cognitive and social psychologists have identified numerous heuristics and, depending on the decisional context, INGO officials may rely on a variety from this set. For tractability, among other reasons,[37] the study will focus on the availability, representative, and affect heuristics (summarized in Table 1 below).

When the availability heuristic is used, probability judgments of an event occurring are positively related to the ease with which an example or case of the event is retrieved in memory. Individuals tend to believe large and more frequent classes of events[38] are easier to retrieve in memory than smaller, less likely classes of events. The use of the availability heuristic could lead to bias and unexpected outcomes in issue selection. Issues which are easier to recall to memory may not be those issues which are most pervasive, have a higher probability of occurring, or are of greatest consequence in reducing human harm. Events which are recent, vivid, and draw attention tend to be more memorable, though they may be a poor sample of overall, real-world trends (Tversky and Kahneman 1974; 1979. See also: Kahneman et al. 1982; Gilovich et al. 2002). By this logic, rights violations that are recent or involve particularly vivid instances of suffering[39] may be more readily recalled to INGO officials' minds and selected for attention, even if other abuses occur more frequently and affect more victims.

[37] The availability and representative heuristics have proven robust to experimental testing and have been fruitfully applied by social scientists in diverse decisional contexts. McDermott 2001. The affect heuristic was more recently introduced, and may prove to be an important extension of the literature on heuristics. Kahneman 2003: 1463. Slovic et al. 2002.

[38] Perception of scale and frequency of phenomena is likely to be shaped not only by personal experience, but also by external factors, including media coverage and framing by other actors. Bob 2007.

[39] We would expect instances of killing, violence, and other violations of physical integrity, to be especially cognitively retrievable, and thus prioritized, over abuses relation to discrimination or exploitation.

The representative heuristic is also linked to probability judgments of events. It is used to evaluate whether an event belongs to a broader population or class of phenomena, based on perceived similarities between them. Individuals tend to focus on events which are analogous to, or fit well within, a pre-existing mental schema (McDermott 2011, p. 11). A key mechanism is historical analogy.[40] Analogies help decision-makers define what an issue X is a case of, and the extent to which its implications will resemble those of past issues categorized within the same schema. For example, in light of the conflicts in Syria and Libya, officials are likely to have a "government repression of protesters" schema. When a new case of attacks on peaceful demonstrations emerges, officials may draw analogies to these major cases, compare the stakes for human rights protection, and predict similar outcomes, often to the neglect of important contextual variables. This may bias judgments, however, as not all cases of government repression descend into civil war or end up as violent and long-lived as Syria and Libya. The reasoning process may be outlined as follows: "AX:BX::AY:BY. In words, event A resembles event B in having characteristic X; A also has characteristic Y; therefore it is inferred that B also has characteristic Y…the unknown BY is inferred from the three known terms…" (Khong 1993, p. 7). According to this logic, INGO officials will select issues if they are perceived as representative of a schema, or class of events, with higher stakes for human rights protection (Kahneman and Tversky 1974, p. 26).

When using the affect heuristic, assessments of risk and probable outcomes are based on emotional associations, either positive or negative, with an event or phenomenon (Slovic et al. 2002). For instance, when individuals are treated to have a positive affective response to energy alternatives, such as nuclear power, they perceive the benefits of its use to be high and risks to be low (Finucane et al. 2002). When a negative affective response is stimulated, people are more likely to judge the risks to be high and the benefits to be low. The affect heuristic adds an additional layer to the theory. Most theories of risk and choice are "cognitive and consequentialist", based on an "expectation-based

[40] Khong 1993. Another related mechanism is attribute substitution. Attribute substitution occurs when "an individual assesses a specified target attribute of a judgment object by substituting another property of that object – the heuristic attribute – which comes more readily to mind" (Kahneman and Frederick 2002, p. 53).

calculus" (Loewenstein et al 2001, p. 267). But existing psychological evidence shows that "…emotional reactions to risky situations often diverge from cognitive assessments of those risks" (Loewenstein et al 2001, p. 267). It is probable that a heightened emotional response on the part of INGO officials may impact selection. If an issue X elicits a greater, positive affective response than an issue Y,[41] either due to the nature of the rights violation, the victim group, or perpetrator, it may be more likely to be selected. For example, if officials or members of their personal network have first-hand experience with a rights violation, or were socialized to regard certain kinds of issues as particularly important[42] – two potential stimulants of affective response – they may view the benefits of tackling the issue to be higher and the risks[43] to be lower than other options. We also might expect INGO officials to have a positive affective response to victims of human rights violations who they share a political or cultural affinity with, such as a commitment to human rights norms.

Table 1. Summary of Heuristics

Heuristic	*Description*	*Operation*	*Illustration of Bias*
Availability	Probability judgment of event(s) occurring	Memory retrieval	Overestimation of risks associated with vivid/memorable cases
Representative	Probability judgment of event(s) occurring	Perception of similarity/ attribute substitution	Overestimation of event belonging to parent class
Affect	Perception of risk and benefits	Affective response	Misjudging risks and benefits of event/action

Source: Gilovich et al. 2002. Slovic et al. 2002.

[41] Positive, negative, or neutral emotional responses to an issue may arise from personal experience/exposure, socialization, or training, among other sources.
[42] Research shows both areas of universality and cultural variability in affective response. Scherer and Wallbott 1994.
[43] One potential risk is that, by adopting an issue, it may lead to backlash or retrenchment on the part of a perpetrator. Risk may also relate to the INGO itself. If decision-makers wish to act on a contentious issue due to an affective response, they may perceive risks associated with doing so, such as harming relations with partners, financial costs, reputational damage, and future access to governments or other influential actors, to be lessened.

Focusing on the heuristics, summarized in Table 1, raises the question of why these particular heuristics have been selected over others. One reason for choosing the availability and representative heuristics derives from their longstanding theorizing and empirical validation, from the early decades of the behaviour decision research program in psychology in the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to a substantial list of heuristics which have been posited by researchers, these two heuristics have undergone systematic theorizing and experimentation over several decades. We can therefore be confident in their operation, boundaries, and validity. In their pioneering work, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky also identified availability and representativeness as "general purpose" heuristics, with broadly realizable functions related to the role of memory and similarity in human judgment.[44] These heuristics may therefore be relevant across decisional environments and substantive domains. More recently, IR scholars such as Rose McDermott have delineated how these specific heuristics may be applicable to a large array of decision-making contexts of interest to political scientists, providing a template for their adaptation.[45] Based on established reference frames, both heuristics are likely to inform the intuitive judgments of INGO officials and shape the sense of urgency surrounding issue profiles. In a similar fashion, while the affect heuristic was a later addition to the group of general purpose heuristics, its inclusion in this category has been based on a rigorous process of theorizing and testing.[46] Its focus on emotional response or, more specifically, intuitive judgments as to the "goodness" or "badness" of events and scenarios and how this impacts perception of risk, contributes a further layer to the primarily cognitive nature of this research domain, one which has been extensively validated in prior studies. We have already noted now emotion and moral judgment may be closely connected.[47] One may surmise, based on the ethical dimension of the selection dilemma, that affective experience is especially likely to form a key

[44] Tverskty and Kahneman 1973; 1974; Kahneman and Frederick 2002.
[45] McDermott 2001.
[46] Slovic et al. 2002.
[47] Haidt 2008.

component of officials' responses to candidate issues and the choice between them, making the affect heuristic a logical choice for inclusion.

In sum, the focus on these heuristics reflects their theoretical and empirical validation in psychology, their status as general purpose heuristics with a wide range of applicability, existing work elucidating how they – in this case availability and representativeness – may be adapted to political science, and the theoretical connection one can draw between the operation of these heuristics and the nature of the selection problems faced by INGO decision-makers. Perhaps most critically, theoretically speaking, each of these three heuristics may be especially salient for ethical dilemmas concerning the likely outcomes of INGO action, given they could provide officials with economical means of making inferences about the probable implications of discrete choices between issues. Memory, perception of similarity, and affective response are central and recurring aspects of intuitive reasoning in general and may well shape the process of preference formation for INGO officials.

Having explained the logic behind the selection of the aforementioned heuristics, we may briefly reflect on the prospective relationship between them during decision-making. In practice, the operation of heuristics may overlap or be employed in conjunction with each other. Consider the following scenario. When a candidate issue is being assessed, in accordance with the representative heuristic, one may expect officials to draw on analogies to past events and cases to aid judgment formation. However, this raises a question: which events and cases will be alluded to and why? Part of the answer may lie with the availability heuristic. Analogies made using the representative heuristic may be shaped by schemata that are easily accessible in memory, and therefore impacted by the availability heuristic. Similarly, what schemata are vivid or attention-drawing, and thus available, may in turn be influenced by past, affective responses to particular rights violations. As Kahneman (2003) notes, attention may be drawn by "emotionally arousing stimuli", making associated features of issue options more accessible and salient for decision-makers; the affect heuristic may therefore inform the accessibility of information for officials. As this scenario illustrates, it is plausible that heuristics may, at times, reinforce each other and exhibit certain interdependencies.

In fact, depending on the circumstances, there are several possibilities for how heuristics might relate to one another. They may be complementary or additive, enter into conflict – that is, point in contrasting directions in terms of selection – or be dominant or subordinate relative to others, depending on the decisional context. This situation is complicated by the uncertain determinants of heuristic use. Which heuristics are employed, the order in which they may be used, and how they relate to each other in the decision-making process, is likely to be affected by factors such as the nature of the decisional task, the experience, disposition, or pre-existing knowledge of the actor, and a variety of situational factors (Lau and Redlawsk 2001, pp. 958-959).

However, while we may map out certain possibilities, to date we know remarkably little about how heuristics might overlap or interact. Although some scholars have tentatively explored the logics by which heuristics relate to one another, this literature remains exploratory, without systematic theorizing, and absent any serious empirical investigation.[48] This is unsurprising, given that for many years the heuristics and biases research programme in psychology saw heuristics "…described as a collection of disparate cognitive procedures, related only by their common function in a particular judgmental domain" (Kahneman and Frederick 2005, p. 287). Summarizing the programme itself, in terms of its nature and ambitions, offers insight into why our knowledge of the interactions among heuristics is limited:

> "The two-system model [of cognition] is a framework that combines a set of empirical generalizations about cognitive operations with a set of tests for diagnosing the types of cognitive operations that underlie judgments in specific situations" (Kahneman and Frederick 2005, p. 288).

As this description suggests, existing scholarship on heuristics has primarily focused on identifying, theorizing, and empirically testing the kinds of heuristics that generally arise when

[48] For an example of tentative, existing explorations of how heuristics may manifest in the decision-making process, see: https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/expose/book/interactions-heuristics-and-biases-making-decisions

System 1 – of the dual model of cognition – is employed, rather than examining the specifics of how they overlap and interact. Looking at the classic texts in the field, we can see how heuristics have been theorized and empirically evaluated as discrete cognitive operations. For example, in Kahneman et al.'s (1982) text, individual heuristics are treated as discrete phenomenon, with little to no examination of they relate to each other. In Gilovich et al. (2002) we see a similar strategy, where the "theoretical and empirical extensions" of work on heuristics is aimed at each one individually. In the sections on future research directions, the subject of overlap or interaction among heuristics is not broached, indicating it is not an analytical priority for now.

At present, due to current limits in our understanding in the field of psychology, we possess very little knowledge of how heuristics relate and, as a consequence, how this may be theorized in political science. While we might map out possible scenarios for these relationships, we are on uncertain terrain in doing so. As explicated above, the theoretical framework in this thesis treats the availability, representative, and affect heuristic as effectively separable. This approach is line with the psychology literature. Of course, this does not negate potential challenges the relationship between heuristics might raise in the empirical work. For instance, one difficulty which may arise is that, when identifying evidence for one heuristic, we may misconstrue the comparative role of another heuristic in its operation. What seems to be evidence for one heuristic may be a second order effect from another, which may be producing the main causal effects. A strong affective response, for example, may be matched with subsequent use of availability or representativeness, but it is the initial experience of affect that may weigh most heavily on decision-making.[49]

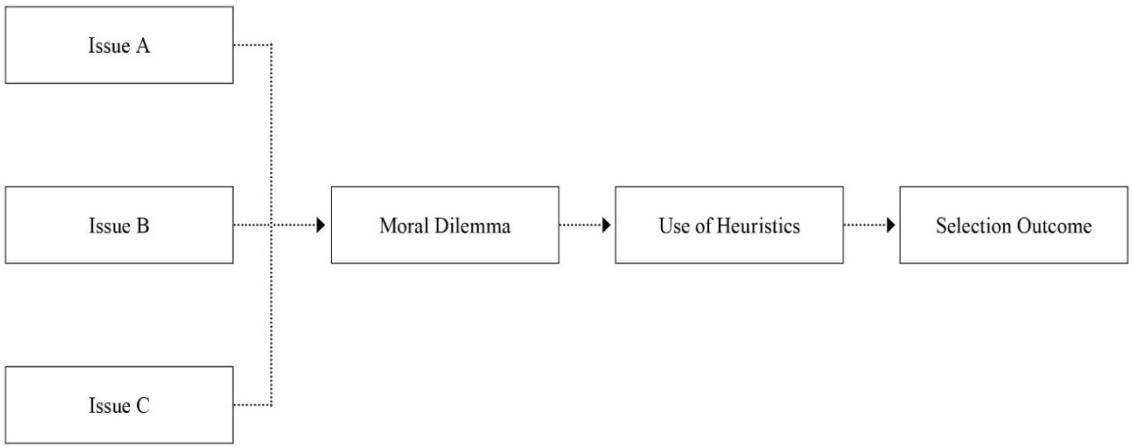
This said, while recognizing the issue, it does not appear to present a major challenge for the empirical work. Much of the political psychology literature in IR proceeds on the basis that heuristics are conceptually and empirically separable, and the thesis therefore conforms to established practice in the field. More to the point, it is not essential for the theoretical argument to disentangle the heuristics and assess their relative causal import (if this is indeed possible given potential

[49] *Ibid*.

interdependencies). The crux of the theory is not whether a particular heuristic is used or not – or in what combination they may manifest– as these may be closely related, but the role of heuristic-led judgment in determining choice outcomes more generally. If heuristics in general are shown to play a key role on selection choices, and they do a better job at explaining our outcomes of interest than alternative explanations, such as those related to organizational self-interest, this provides important support for the argument advanced in the thesis.

With this background examined, we may turn to an overview of the proposed model. The model, which connects candidate issues to selection outcomes by way of decision-making heuristics and the ethical dilemma they help resolve, is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Model of issue selection using cognitive heuristics.



The theorized role of heuristics in selection relate to the judgments of key officials in INGOs, understood as executive members and leading officials within thematic and regional teams. As a consequence, the role and importance of individuals in the theory require further specification. One central reason to focus on individuals is that by situating individual officials at its centre, the theory ensures a tight linkage between findings in social and cognitive psychology on heuristics and the actors driving selection outcomes in INGOs. This is because cognition and affective responses are – by and large, according to our current understanding – individually embodied processes, with existing

knowledge in behaviour decision research based on the study of individuals, the core unit of interest in the field (Kahneman and Frederick 2002). Relatedly, an increasing number of IR studies have recognized the analytical benefits of focusing on individual decision-makers, noting not only their – often underestimated – freedom to shape outcomes in international politics, but also the enhanced relevance of psychological theories for understanding policy choices in aggregate bodies (Gallagher and Allen 2014; Dyson 2006).

There are good reasons to suppose that individuals may be particularly influential in INGOs. One basis for this is their centralized character. In contrast to institutional structures of decision-making in democracies or regional institutions, INGOs are much less focused on democratic check and balances. Such groups typically lack the "regularized mechanisms for internal debate; loyal oppositions; inter-institutional checks and balances; and independent assessment of policies or leaders" that we associate with democratic leadership (Bob 2007, p. 3). The intensive mechanisms of evaluation we see in parliamentary systems of governance, for example, where legislation may be passed between committees and houses of representatives, may act as a filtering system that diminishes the effects of heuristics. As these collective processes are absent from INGOs, this reduces the likelihood of heuristic effects being side-lined by internal mechanisms of deliberation. One might conceive of this distinction in terms of "vertical" and "horizontal" systems of organization. Whereas horizontal structures emphasize collaboration, discussion, and the exchange of competing ideas, INGOs – often exhibiting vertical characteristics – tend to have protocols that empower senior staff to move forward with ideas without extensive oversight or collective involvement (Aoki 1986).

Another factor in considering the role of individuals in INGOs is the effect of self-selection. Senior individuals in INGOs tend to be highly educated and experienced professionals – thus being employable in many high-paid industries – who make a conscious decision to select into an INGO based on its mission and ethos. In other words, staff may well be selected for particular systems of belief. Again, this produces a significantly different decisional environment than is present with other

collective bodies. Political institutions, such as country or regional parliaments, often encompass actors with diverging belief systems and perceptions of interests. With INGOs, however, processes of selection into each group tends to result in staff being much more homogeneous along these dimensions. This means that the preferences of individual decision-makers are less likely to be challenged by other staff. In this manner, both the institutional structure and make-up of staff are more amenable to the expression of individual preferences. As I have noted, prior IR studies have posited the key role of individuals in international politics; this seems especially likely to be the case in INGOs.

A final consideration regarding the importance of individuals is the culture of deference to expertise which is common to INGOs, a tendency related to the professionalization of the industry. Navigating the human rights and humanitarian sectors requires significant technical knowledge and INGOs may expend sizable resources to procure experts in their field. Having acquired competencies at the top of the organization, INGOs tend to afford experts a large degree of autonomy to fulfil their roles. This is because allowing experts to perform critical tasks such as selection – a decision which requires substantial knowledge of the choice environment – may be perceived to ensure coherent alignment with INGOs' mandates. Lacking comparable competencies, other staff are unlikely to have the inclination – or ability – to meaningfully challenge the decisions of experts in their area of knowledge. This mitigates against "internal bargaining" and competing interpretations of organizational direction which may otherwise arise (Marquez 2016). A culture of deference to expertise may therefore be a contributing factor to the influential role of individual decision-makers in selecting issues.

Taken together, we may note the following about the role of individuals in the theory. The emphasis on individuals promotes consistency between theoretical and empirical findings in psychology grounded at the individual level. Cognition and affect are individually embodied and focusing on individual decision-makers forms a close linkage between work in psychology and the actors of interest. We may therefore expect that heuristics operate among individuals, while it is more

uncertain how they may manifest in or impact collective-decision-making. Further, the centralized patterns of decision-making in INGOs (precluding systematic checks and balances), homogenizing processes of self-selection into the organization, and a culture of deference to senior experts, all suggest that individuals may play a crucial role in selection. The theory therefore supposes that heuristics function at the individual level, with institutional and cultural features of INGOs conducive to the expression of individual-level traits during the selection process.

A corollary of the preceding discussion is that heuristics are less relevant in systems of collective decision-making. Indeed, psychology theories in IR, such as this one, tend to give primacy to individuals and small groups of decision-makers (Powell 2017). In scenarios where procedures have been established to examine selection choices, the probability of heuristic effects being attenuated may be viewed as commensurate to the intensity of the scrutiny, the number of actors involved, and the level of heterogeneity – in respect of the exchange of diverse perspective – among participants. The effect of heuristics may therefore be contingent on these organizational features. Where decision-making takes a collective form, and selection choices are subject to a decentralized process that encompasses diverse perspectives and scrutiny, the explanatory value of heuristics is likely to be lessened. However, this does not mean the use of heuristics is incompatible with organizational effects. It is possible, for instance, that patterns of decision-making informed by heuristics become inscribed in organizational practices and are therefore reproduced at the group level, in part through norms and procedures embedded in INGOs, a possibility discussed in more length in Section 2.4. Presently, we may clarify the relationship between the proposed theory and organizational effects proffered by a potentially competing framework – well-known in the literature on public administration, institutions, and organizational behaviour – path dependency (PD). We have already seen that the primary competing explanation this thesis engages with pertains to organizational self-interest, as well as that the thesis addresses a posited incompleteness on the part of constructivist theories. In discussing PD, we may then ask, how should we conceive of the relationship between heuristics and PD, and why is it elided as a competing explanation relative to others?

By PD I refer to the processes by which prior choices and behaviours in organizations act over time to constrain the options available to decision-makers at a later timepoint. Ultimately, as the "number of alternative choices gradually decreases", new phases of decision-making are in large part determined by the past, whereby the organization may become "locked-in" to particular future pathways (Bergek and Onufrey 2014, p. 1261-1262). Defined as such, PD faces an immediate difficulty in explaining selection patterns within this project's scope. Although PD may have been germane to selection prior to the end of the Cold War, where the remits of large INGOs tended to be substantively narrow, it appears far less adept at explaining processes of selection from the 1990s onwards, the period under examination. The vast proliferation of issues in the subsequent two decades – when issues were incorporated into INGO mandates which were novel to them, such as the environment, LGBT rights, cultural rights and so on – and the subsequent need to adjudicate between this new set of issues, cannot be adequately accounted for by PD. For example, it is unclear how we could employ PD to explain how Amnesty International, focused as it was for decades on breaches of a finite group of civil and political rights, may now choose to focus its attention on the plight of indigenous farmers in Latin America, the provision of facilities for those with disabilities, or the human rights implications of artificial intelligence. Many issues which AI now work on are quite divorced from past agendas, an occurrence inconsistent with what one would expect to observe under PD. Rather than past choices constraining emergent pathways for action, it appears that decision-makers have significant room for selecting issues which are quite divorced from the organization's traditional focus. Put simply, PD processes tend toward the narrowing of the available choice set, while the identified selection dilemma faced by officials is characterized by an abundance of choice, with patterns of selection – including a host of novel issue areas – appearing to be weakly determined by past choices.

Building on this point, even if PD appeared, prima facie, to be a more plausible candidate explanation, it is not clear that it would constitute a competing explanation or was incongruent with the theory advanced here. On the contrary, heuristic-led judgment may be consistent with the organizational dynamics imputed by PD. To utilize PD as an analytical concept, the mechanisms or positive "feedback

loops" which drive the underlying process – where past decisions on issue selection may limit deviation from emergent paths – require specification. PD may be regarded, on its own merits, not as a theory per se – it does not, after all, provide us with a set of explanatory variables or mechanisms, nor tell us how they are connected – but as a descriptive or empirical concept that allows us to make sense of a "temporal process" (Kay 2003, p. 406).

To employ PD, scholars must construct "theories and models that explain the microfoundations of path dependent processes" (Kay 2003, p. 407). PD is compatible with multiple theoretical approaches, including those based on psychology, and the psychology of judgment on the part of key officials may offer the microfoundations necessary for its theorization.[50] Information retrieval and processing through heuristics could provide the positive feedback loops necessary for PD. To use an illustrative example, heuristics are especially likely to affect organizational learning.[51] Learning from past errors, as well as interpreting new issues within pre-existing frameworks, is central to the work of INGOs and PD. Yet learning in INGOs is often haphazard, conducted informally without systematic or institutionalized learning procedures.[52] What examples and lessons come to memory (availability), how issues are analogized and related to past cases (representativeness), will impact how issues within the available choice set are interpreted. If a particular group of candidate issues are judged to be more similar to previous areas of work than alternative options – a judgment made in part through use of heuristics – then the choice set may be constrained on this basis. Psychology may therefore provide mechanisms connecting past choices to narrowing pathways of future action, offering a theoretical underpinning for PD.

In sum, PD does not appear to particularly useful in accounting for selection choices since the proliferation of options after the 1990s, the period of interest to the thesis. Many of the issues taken on by INGOs in recent years are very different than those selected under past mandates. And to the

[50] For more on the nature of path dependence arguments, their compatibility with diverse theoretical frameworks, and the importance of microfoundations, see: (Kay 2003).
[51] Organizational learning is a potential re-enforcing mechanism for PD. Koch et al. (2009, p. 69.)
[52] This issue is discussed further in the case studies.

extent that PD may be relevant, it does not appear incompatible with the heuristic-based account proffered in this thesis. Therefore, while processes of PD may be remarked upon in the empirics, it is not treated as a fully-fledged competing explanation.

An alternative explanatory framework may emphasise strategic considerations, such as donor funding, project costs, public opinion, and media effects. In composite,[53] these explanations suggest alternative, instrumental motives for selection, whereby INGOs seek out "easy wins". That is, officials will pursue issues that maximize positive exposure for the organization while limiting the outlay of resources. In addition, one might highlight the role of dominant human rights norms and a logic of appropriateness in guiding INGO behaviour. By this logic, issues that fit well with pre-existing normative agendas – officials may be motivated to preserve norms – as well as shared values in the INGO sector, may be favoured for selection.[54] This said, cognitive and norm-orientated approaches may not be entirely incompatible. Scholars have argued that psychological postulates inform the lower-level assumptions of constructivism (Goldgeier and Tetlock 2001). The micro-foundations imputed by the study's theory may shed light on key questions that may elude constructivist theories. These include why – in the presence of equally strong human rights norms – decision-makers choose certain issues over others, why norm entrepreneurs mobilize for particular causes and not others, why officials find certain issue attributes salient, and when norms are viewed as applicable to issue cases.[55]

[53] For reasons of tractability these factors are bracketed together.
[54] There is a range of possible alternative explanations, both within and between analytical frameworks. Due to spatial limitations, the focus is on those mentioned.
[55] For more on this, see: Goldgeier and Tetlock 2001: 83-86.

Table 2. Explanations of Issue Selection

Explanation	*Reasons for Action*	*Logic of Selection*
Availability heuristic	High probability of negative human rights outcome	Ease of retrieval of past cases (e.g. vivid suffering/imagery)
Representative heuristic	High probability of negative human rights outcome.	Analogous to parent class
Affect heuristic	Low risk/high benefit of taking action	High affective response
Strategic incentives	Easy win	Instrumental logic
Prevailing norms	Aligned with norm agendas and values in INGO network	Logic of appropriateness

Observable Implications

As a preliminary empirical step, we should assess whether each of the cases are consistent with relevant scope conditions. For instance, we should observe clear evidence that decision-makers face the postulated selection dilemma. Although we can identify INGOs who operate within a multidimensional issue space in advance, because this thesis proposes a novel conceptualization of the dilemma facing officials, confirming its presence requires empirical engagement. Proliferation of issue coverage by the INGOs should result in a predicament for officials; it should be evident from the interviews and other qualitative data that selection challenges are a salient topic of concern for decision-makers, with issues having competing claims on attention.

Regarding the theory, if it is accurate, we would expect the decision-making process to exhibit two features. First, we should observe that a small number of key officials play an important role in determining issue priorities.[56] While heuristics may become inscribed in organizational practices over

[56] While this observation may lend support to the theory, its absence does not eliminate it. As noted, heuristics may also become institutionalized in decisional procedures over time, and provide mechanisms of positive feedback for processes of path dependence.

time, heuristics are primarily individually embodied and, should individual officials exert significant sway over the ranking process, it would lend credence to claims that heuristic-led judgment may be of causal import. Second, another implication of the theory – though less important – is that officials should make selection decisions in the absence of standardized or optimized systems of cross-issue comparison. As we have discussed, a lack of reliable information is not critical to the dilemma or theory, but limited monitoring, evaluation, learning, and information diffusion may exacerbate the selection problems faced by officials. Where reliable information is not forthcoming and the dilemma is exacerbated, the use of heuristics may be especially salient.

The main observable implications relate to the motivational logic or "reasons for action" which drive selection. Underpinning the heuristic-led account is the claim that INGO decision-makers are primarily motivated to do good and lessen human harm. Factors such as donor preferences, organizational reputation, and other instrumental incentives should be subordinate to logics of human protection. If the availability heuristic is used, we would expect to observe an informal hierarchy[57] of issue types, where decision-makers select issues that involve more vivid suffering and imagery, at the potential expense of issues that involve more human harm in the aggregate. In their reasoning, decision-makers should not only be concerned with how many people are at risk, but also *in what way* they are suffering. Given their vivid nature, issues related to violence, torture, and physical assault should take precedence over issues that are equally harmful or deadly but perhaps less evocative, such as hunger and disease.[58] In interviews and the documentary record we should see appeals to the egregious nature of certain forms of suffering in calculations of issue severity.

If the representative heuristic is used, we would expect officials to define issues, assess their moral stakes, and consider the need for action through analogy to past cases. Officials should exhibit

[57] While INGOs may formally and rhetorically commit to the equal pursuit and indivisibility of human rights, in practice the theory expects a hierarchy of issue priorities.

[58] These implications are also consistent with the study's other two heuristics. When using the representative heuristic, individuals pay particular attention to events with a clear causal chain. Identifying such a chain is generally easier with abuses of physical integrity, rather than issues such as hunger and disease. Individuals may also have a heightened affective response to abuses of physical integrity.

concern that (current) issue X – due to perceived resemblances between them – may have the human rights implications of (past) issue Y, and thus either warrants or does not warrant attention. If issue Y is viewed as involving particularly serious human rights violations, then its counterpart issue X will be selected. If issue Y had less serious implications, or no salient analogy is forthcoming, officials may pass up advocacy on issue X. When justifying selection between options, we would therefore expect officials to employ analogies to past cases in the perceived parent classes of those issues.

If the affect heuristic is employed, reasons for action proffered by officials may reference their own experience with the issue. An issue area might be especially salient in their country, they or their family may have first-hand experience of it, or they may have personal contacts who have been the victims of particular violations of human rights. A further indicator of affect is the use of emotionally charged language. Phrases such as "we just have to do something", "we cannot let this continue", or "I really feel strongly about this", suggest the use of intuitive emotional judgment. Relatedly, an inability to explain one's issue preferences or dedication to an issue may be evidence of emotional intuition (Haidt 2008). In addition, as positive affective response tends to increase with familiarity to a subject or object, we may anticipate decision-makers to favour specific causes when they share a political or cultural affinity with those suffering, e.g. they are peaceful, pro-democratic, and respect human rights norms.[59]

2.4 Psychological Approaches and Aggregation

Constructing a theory of decision-making and drawing causal inferences in relation to the collective political behaviour of TAN members on the basis of theoretical and experimental work in behavioural decision research positioned at the individual level of analysis raises the question of what

[59] Given the ideational commitments of INGOs, as well as that affective response may operate unconsciously, it is unlikely that officials will speak in terms of more or less deserving victims, or that we will find smoking-gun evidence for this mode of reasoning. However, preferences for certain kinds of victim groups may manifest in selection patterns.

Levy (1997, pp. 102-104) terms the aggregation problem. As cognitive heuristics operate at the individual level, their causal effect may be difficult to transpose to organizational behaviour or group-based decision-making as these environments may bring forth their own unique dynamics. The causal influence of the aforementioned three heuristics may be superseded by the institutional and interactive group environment within which they are bound and operate, factors which require explicit recognition in suggesting plausible alternative explanations to the study's proposed theoretical framework.

As Vis (2009, p. 9) notes, however, the aggregation problem may not be as insurmountable as it initially appears. One scenario where this challenge can be effectively circumvented is when individuals are sufficiently influential in the decision-making process that collective decisions are essentially a reflection of individual preferences. For example, within the TAN that developed in response to the repression of protesters by the Libyan government in 2011, mobilization toward NATO intervention was said to be spearheaded by French intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy, who drew large-scale attention to the crisis and reputedly convinced the French President Nicolas Sarkozy of the merits of intervention (France24 2016). As TANs are in part made up of individual actors of this kind, such as journalists, academics, activists, and intellectuals, examining the decisions of these individuals to prioritize humanitarian issues is theoretically consistent with analysis at the individual level of analysis. This is also true to the extent that TANs are dominated by organizations with centralized structures of decision-making where decisions are determined by key individual actors. Through specifically focusing, when appropriate, on these leading individuals, the aggregation problem may be mitigated.

One possible objection to this approach is that, even if INGO decisions are in some instances the product of individual preferences, the individuals making the decisions may exhibit characteristics which make them incomparable to low or mid-level members of INGOs and less susceptible to reliance on heuristic-led judgements. For instance, issue selection driven by senior members of INGOs may much better approximate rationalist expectations due to high levels of training,

expertise, and experience. However, it has been clear from the outset of the behavioural decision research program led by Kahneman and Tversky that experts are also vulnerable to the biases which accompany intuitive reasoning in the dual processing model. As Kahneman (2002, p. 450) recounts, experimentation involving researchers with sophisticated statistical knowledge revealed systematic deviations in their judgements from statistical principles that they were well-versed in. This work revealed persistent discrepancies between the expected responses of statistical experts according to their training and their actual judgements, with subjects' "…intuitive statistical inferences and their estimates of statistical power showed a striking lack of sensitivity to the effects of sample size" (Kahneman 2002, p. 450). Irrationality among experts and elite decision-makers has also been empirically corroborated elsewhere. Armstrong's (1980) study of expert forecasting in economics reveals that expertise beyond a minimum level is of no real added value, as experts are liable to much the same biases and mistakes as non-experts. Vis' (2019) review of the literature on heuristics and political elites also finds that politicians are liable to use heuristics to form judgements and make decisions. Similarly, Tetlock (2005) finds that experts are susceptible to error in forecasting across various industries and, perhaps surprisingly, there is often an inverse relationship beyond accuracy of predictions and the higher the status of experts. Expertise, then, appears to leave individuals no less susceptible to systematic error in decision-making. Experts also rely on cognitive heuristics to simplify circumstances of informational complexity or uncertainty in the decision-making process.

This said, it may still be reasonably contended that patterns of prioritization within INGOs primarily result from group or organizational dynamics, rather than merely the preferences of key individuals. Yet, this objection too may not present a major problem to adopting a psychological approach to explaining issue selection. A plethora of experimental and empirical literature exists which suggests that the observable implications of individual preferences, including those emanating from psychological mechanisms, manifest in group-based organizational and political behaviour (see: Vis 2009). For example, Bowman's (1980) comprehensive analysis of firms across eleven industries concludes that organizations routinely behave much like individuals do. Vis (2009, pp. 8-9) also

concludes that organizational behaviour in terms of risk assessment is consistent with the predictions of prospect theory, a theoretical framework that is situated at the individual level of analysis. Whyte's (1993) experimental study of the idea of escalating commitment from prospect theory, involving the assessment of contrasting investment decision scenarios, finds that groups are even more likely to conform to the predictions of prospect theory than individuals are. Kühberger's (1998) meta-analysis of 248 journal articles which investigate risky decision-making across different fields such as psychology, medicine, and business, suggests that reported effect sizes for decision-making by both individuals and groups are similar. In addition, we now possess experimental evidence that decision-making by pairs of individuals tends to contravene the expectations of expected utility theory in a comparable manner to the way individuals do (Kameda and Davis 1990). This literature suggests that decision-making outcomes can be surprisingly consistent with each other whether the unit of analysis is an individual or group (Vis 2009, p. 9).

Furthermore, drawing on Johnson (2015, p. 760), juxtaposing the causal influence of institutional characteristics or group decision-making structures within organizations or networks and the use of individual-level psychological mechanisms appears to set up artificial dichotomies. This is because psychological biases may well be baked into institutional frameworks from the outset through elite preferences, or indeed through adaptation to the behaviour of actors in their field of operation, and therein are reflected in collective decision-making processes and policy outcomes. For example, Amnesty International's history of issue selection over a period of 50 years clearly bears the hallmarks of founder Peter Benenson's decision to focus on the plight of political prisoners (see: Hopgood 2006). Psychological biases may also be reproduced in group interactions given the self-selection of group members into organizations and TANs, as well as decision-making processes being bounded through shared models of cognition. Individuals are likely to identify with and self-select into humanitarian organizations and networks which share the mores of those individuals in respect of organizational goals, strategy, and mode of operation, in turn shaping and re-enforcing the outcomes which attracted them to the organization. Felin and Foss (2005, p. 450) highlight the crucial

importance of mechanisms of self-selection in organizational behaviour, noting that influential individuals are attracted to particular work environments and that these same individuals play a key role in determining overall policy outcomes. While typical of organizational recruitment generally, this appears particularly salient for areas of high vocation such as humanitarianism. For instance, those who endorse a view of human rights protection orientated toward aid provision or building states' domestic capacities are unlikely to choose to work with organizations that promote solutions which emphasise the role of military intervention, or to favour a shift in their organization toward such a policy framework. In this way, self-selection into humanitarian bodies may in fact act to re-enforce commonly held individual preferences and biases, rather than challenge them in a group environment.

Further, as Simon (1952, p. 1135) notes, once part of an organization internal organizational processes also help groups of individuals to decipher complex social realities through simplified common cognitive models which determine relevant phenomena, provide a shared system of classification, and encompass implicit "givens" which inform goals and the parameters of decision-making. The common model gives structure to individual level heuristics and leads to increasingly convergent views and preferences among organizational members. In this manner institutional settings may not foment unique group dynamics or preferences which mitigate the use of heuristics, but create a "shared perceptual model" that solidifies selection mechanisms of "…information [that] has already been selected, summarized, and then transmitted to an individual by the other organization members who share identical perceptual references" (Koumakov 2009, p. 300). Thus, self-selection in recruitment and the promulgation of shared models of cognition among members who are often motivated by similar mores may engender mutual perceptual reference points that promote heuristic-led judgement and decision-making beyond the individual level. Through this process the prospective gap between decisions at the individual and group level may effectively be bridged, further suggesting that the supposed rationalizing effects of institutions may be overstated.

Moreover, the rationalist contention that institutions are designed to act, and effectively function as, preventive mechanisms against the expression of individual-level biases appears to rest on a tenuous assumption and is subject to question. As the organizational institutionalism literature attests, the formal structures of organizations are often the product of rationalized "myths" rather than being carefully calibrated to override biases and meet the exigencies of their specific goals and environment. Institutional architectures emanating from social and legitimating factors such as public opinion, elite judgements, constituent preferences, legal requirements, and social prestige are presented as impersonally driven to meet technical demands. These formal structures become institutionalized, assume a taken-for-granted status, and are retained quite separate "…from evaluations of their impact on work outcomes" (Meyer and Rowan 1977, p. 343).

Extending from this, and pertinently for analyses of network-based decision-making in TANs, such organizational irrationalities regularly manifest themselves beyond individual organizations and percolate to entire organizational fields, that is the group of organizations perceived by fellow actors to be engaged in comparable work. As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) observe, structural change within and between institutions and organizations tends toward a pattern of homogenization which is inconsistent with rationalist assumptions. Through isomorphic[60] processes, actors in the same field tend to exhibit more and more similarities without any necessary relationship to efficiency or policy optimization. As Schelling (1978) points out, organizations do not interpret their needs in isolation but respond to an environment which is made up of similar organizations who in turn are operating in and responding to actors in the same organization field. Institutional design which is context-specific and exemplifies requirements particular to individual organizations to improve performance tends to recede over time in favour of sub-optimal innovations derived from considerations of legitimacy and what is interpreted to be normatively sanctioned in a given field. Further still, as we have already seen, the elite preferences, shared cognitive models, and mechanisms of self-selection

[60] Isomorphism refers to the similarities in the procedures, rules, processes, design, and structures of particular organized entities. DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 150) identify three mechanisms leading to isomorphic change in organizations and organizational fields: coercive, mimetic, and normative.

which inform organizational behaviour, and from which isomorphic processes may originate, may not in the first instance have corrected for individual heuristics and biases. Isomorphic tendencies may thus lead to the diffusion of institutional designs which not only do not mitigate the effects of psychological mechanisms, but are a direct derivation of them and contribute to their reproduction.

In addition, recent studies have suggested that aggregation may be an overstated problem for psychological IR, with extant approaches to the psychology of collective decision-making– based on a process of conceptual abstraction and generalization – compatible with the conventions of theorisation in the discipline. In this vein, Gildea (2020) argues that aggregation has become something of a disciplinary preoccupation in IR, scrutinizing its supposed limiting effect on the diffusion of psychologically informed research. Gildea (2020, p. 8) posits that any prospective theory of aggregation will run into severe difficulties on account of the complex and contradictory tendencies of individual-level psychological traits and, as a consequence, would be grounded on "weak foundational claims". The theoretical payoffs of focusing on aggregation are therefore open to question. Moreover, he suggests that existing approaches to aggregation appear consistent with conventional approaches to IR theorizing, and that psychological postulates can be employed to explain decisional patterns across different levels of analysis.

Taken together, this literature suggests that the aggregation problem may not be a major obstacle to adopting a psychological approach to issue selection at a level of analysis beyond the individual. This literature illustrates that institutional design is typically not as rational as presumed, and that the psychological mechanisms highlighted in this study may well account for a significant degree of variation in issue selection in INGOs despite being bound within an institutional and interactive decision-making environment. However, this must, as with all IR studies, remain an empirical question. The independent effects of psychological and institutional/group-level factors in issue selection or the overriding impact of institutional and collective dynamics must not be ruled out a priori but should be tested against the empirical evidence.

One drawback of much psychological literature in IR is insufficient transparency in terms of the empirical evaluation of aggregation. Scholars often identify consistencies between their theories and empirical observation of aggregate behaviour as providing support for their explanations. However, this consistency does little to rule out plausible alternative explanations, and merely sidesteps aggregation (see: Johnson 2015, p. 760). To overcome this shortcoming, this study will utilize the qualitative aspect of the research design to conduct assumption diagnostics regarding aggregation and will present these findings. Observable implications regarding aggregation will include how centralized or diffuse structures and processes of decision-making are, the relative importance of key individuals or groups, and the level of scrutiny and debate which accompany policy choices in INGOs.

Chapter 3: Case Study I – Amnesty International

3.1 Introduction

In order to begin assessing the study's theory, the present chapter will examine issue selection in Amnesty International. Amnesty is commonly regarded as the world's foremost human rights INGO. Since its foundation in the 1960s, the group has developed a global reach and can be considered a gatekeeper organization in its field (Bob 2009). Its reputation as a credible and respected human rights actor, as well as its significant size – the group has more than two million members and supporters worldwide – have made it a major player in advocacy networks. For many, Amnesty "has provided a basis for our understanding of what human rights are and has consistently supplied a growing global public with information about human rights abuses" (Wong 2014, p. 84). These attributes have vested the INGO with considerable moral authority and have made it comparatively less vulnerable to attempts at de-legitimation by critics and rights violators (see: Hopgood 2013, pp. 6-9). Amnesty implements a multifaceted advocacy model, tailored to specific areas of human rights protection. This includes, but is not limited to: research, monitoring, and reporting; evidence-based advocacy at the national, regional, and international level; media engagement; promoting human rights education; collaborating with partners; providing support for victims of abuse; and strategic litigation.[61] Given its large size and complex operational structure, Amnesty may be considered a hard test of the study's theory.

As required by its statute, the INGO is guided by a set of strategic goals that help shape its priorities. In a publication entitled "Taking Injustice Personally", its Global Assembly (GA) – the organization's highest decision-making body – identified five strategic goals for the movement to adhere to between

[61] For more information on the 'Theories of Change' that inform Amnesty's work, see: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1031652016ENGLISH.PDF

2016-2019.[62] These overarching goals, which include subjects such as ensuring equal rights, accountability, and the optimization of its own resources and engagement, provide a general impetus for Amnesty's members and staff. They are matched with greater specificity within thematic and national sections. The group's remit is broad, seeking the implementation of "…rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards".[63] This is reflected in the expansive thematic scope of its work, with Amnesty tackling issues as diverse as arms control, climate change, sexual and reproductive rights, and torture.[64] Members and staff face difficult decisions in apportioning resources and attention among each of these different causes, each of which may present singular challenges and demand distinct forms of advocacy.

Complicating the ranking generating process further is Amnesty's complex structure. Amnesty is a membership-based organization with a democratic ethos. Both members and staff participate in the formulation of its priorities, making the process of issue selection time and resource intensive. For instance, the GA is made up of representatives from each section and membership entity, as well as from the international membership. The GA has the power to approve global strategy, modify the group's mission, and make policy decisions on issues of contention. The International Board (IB), on the other hand, is elected by the GA and oversees matters such as choosing the Secretary General, an appointment that may influence the trajectory of the organization.[65] Prioritization also takes place at the level of national sections, offices and thematic teams, whose work is carried out in conjunction with the International Secretariat (IS). The IS provides expert support to the aforementioned entities, and works to ensure coherence across Amnesty's global output. Issue selection therefore takes place across multiple levels of the organization and can involve a significant number of internal actors, particularly when the issue under discussion occupies a contentious area of human rights. To examine contributing factors to issue selection, the chapter begins by analysing general patterns of decision-

[62] The strategic goals can be read here: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1031372016ENGLISH.PDF
[63] Ibid. p. 5.
[64] For an overview of its themes, see: https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/
[65] Internal document shared with the researcher.

making. It subsequentially carries out within-case analysis of a pair of candidate issues. The issues examined are the rights of sex workers (positive) and workers in the textiles industry (negative). Both issues are thematically consistent, situated under the category of worker's rights, thus helping to control for potential confounders.

As with each of the case studies, time is a key consideration when analysing issue selection in Amnesty. How the group conceives of its own mission has undergone significant changes in the past three decades and continues to be subject to debate. The organizational structures, method of deliberation, and (in)formal selection criteria for choosing issue priorities have also shifted over time. At the time of research, Amnesty was in a major period of transition. In 2018, Kumi Naidoo replaced Salil Shetty as Secretary General. In December 2019, Naidoo himself stepped down from the position due to a medical condition, and Julie Verhaar took over his responsibilities as Acting Secretary General. Moreover, throughout 2019 Amnesty was in the midst of a comprehensive process of internal deliberation, aimed at the creation of the next phase of its strategic goals. This offered particularly useful insight into ranking generating process in practice, as decision-makers actively considered and debated the rationale for their choices. How these decisions will ultimately impact Amnesty's priorities in the coming decade is less certain.

The empirical evidence in the chapter provides support for the study's theory. Officials are readily aware that the proliferation of issue coverage and expansion of Amnesty's mission from the 1990s onwards has produced a selection dilemma. While the organization has recently initiated a plan for more systematic learning and evaluation – it remains to be seen how this will impact selection, or the prospective decay of heuristic effects over time[66] – the group does not possess standardized procedures for issue comparison or selection. Despite Amnesty's size and complex structure, the chapter finds that these features of the INGO do not prohibit the use and impact of heuristics. However, heuristics do not appear to be the only factors of causal relevance. Perception of likely

[66] As we shall see in the chapter on Oxfam, sophisticated systems of learning and evaluating do not preclude selection challenges and the use of heuristics.

policy impact, as well issue coverage within the broader INGO network, also seem to drive selection. The effects of donors, public opinion, and the media appear to be less consequential.

The chapter is structured in the following manner. The first section provides a brief overview of the origin and development of Amnesty across several decades, highlighting salient events that contextualize its current properties and method of operation. The second section outlines the INGO's current structure and selection procedures, as well as reflecting on key aspects of its organizational environment. The third part examines a number of competing factors that may explain issue selection, and empirically tests the study's hypothesis. The section also explores the (non-)adoption of two issues by Amnesty's thematic divisions. These include the decriminalization of sex work (positive case) and abuses in the textile industry (negative case). The chapter concludes with a brief summation of findings.

3.2 Origin and Evolution

In his own recounting of it, it was on November 19th 1960 that British barrister and Amnesty founder, Peter Benenson, read a story in The Daily Telegraph about Portugal under António de Oliveira Salazar[67]:

> "…I came on a short paragraph that related how two Portuguese students had been sentenced to terms of imprisonment for no other offence than having drunk a toast to liberty in a Lisbon restaurant. Perhaps because I am particularly attached to liberty, perhaps because I am fond of wine this news-item produced a righteous indignation in me that transcended normal bounds" (Buchanan 2002, p. 575).

Benenson reached out to fellow lawyers and intellectuals to organize the Appeal for Amnesty in May 1961. The appeal was launched with the appearance of an article, penned by Benenson and entitled

[67] Stephen Hopgood (2006, p. 55) notes that the Amnesty leadership were subsequently unable to identify the story about the two Portuguese students, nor did they become Prisoners of Conscience.

"The Forgotten Prisoners", in the *Observer* newspaper. It coined the term "Prisoner of Conscience" (POCs), and aimed at the release of individuals imprisoned for peaceful expression. The appeal received global coverage. Individuals wrote and called offering their support and, within weeks, organizational meetings were held in the UK and abroad, "the Appeal for Amnesty, syndicated worldwide, provoked a large response and was effectively transformed into a permanent organization from December 1961" (Hopgood 2006). The name "Amnesty International" was adopted at an international conference in Belgium in September 1962. The formal make-up of the new group had begun to take shape.

This account is a feature of much of the literature examining Amnesty's early history and, as with many prominent organizations, it is difficult to disentangle fact from fiction or embellishment. This is particularly challenging as institutional memory wanes over time, and perceptions of the past are augmented to meet organizational demands of the present. Tom Buchanan (2002, p. 576) has argued that "…previous histories of Amnesty have been at fault in not testing these 'official' versions", particularly narratives derived from Benenson's own version of events. And yet, acknowledging that elements of Amnesty's "official history" may be laden with apocryphal stories or inaccurate details – some of it aggrandizing or self-serving, as with any organization that has experienced the success and longevity that Amnesty has – for the purposes of the present study a number of key observations may be gleaned.

First, it is clear that Benenson had an important influence on the culture and organizational principles of Amnesty. Benenson "…provided the moral and emotional energy to start Amnesty…his zeal lay behind everything" (Hopgood 2006, p. 54). It was through his personal network, established at Eton and Oxford, as well as in the Labour Party and legal profession, that the idea for a voluntary organization such as Amnesty began to cohere. His legal background, political affiliation with the left, and religious convictions – Christian symbolism is evident in Amnesty's emblem, a candle enmeshed in barbed wire – informed the group's ethos. It is a testament to the force of his personality that the

INGO still bears the hallmarks of his legacy; he continues to be "…invoked, like a touchstone, in Amnesty discussions, and all the secretaries general have visited him…" (Hopgood 2006, p. 54). [68]

Of particular relevance to issue selection is the narrow scope of Amnesty's initial work, which was exclusively focused on POCs. Clarke (2001, p. 6) describes how this work was conducted: "Staff and volunteers in Amnesty's central office at first gleaned information about political arrests from newspapers. They would assign verified prisoner of conscience cases to adoption groups. Group members met regularly to write letters to authorities, seeking humane conditions and release for the prisoner." While POCs and letter writing campaigns remain part of Amnesty's advocacy, the breadth of issues it works on has proliferated markedly. In the 1960s, it would have been difficult to imagine the diversity of issues which the INGO currently works on and, in this sense, Amnesty has charted its own path, well beyond the remit laid down by its founder. Benenson certainly had downstream effects on the evolution of Amnesty. It seems equally apparent that the long-term, institutional effects of his preferences and decisions in the early 1960s were far from determinate in later patterns of issue prioritization.

Of further note is the wider socio-political and cultural context from which Amnesty emerged. In the 1950s the issue of prisoners was one of considerable interest to the left in Britain. Many socialists, communists, and trade unionists had been imprisoned in the post war period in countries such as Spain, Portugal, and Greece (Buchanan 2002, p. 579). Amnesty set itself apart in its early years by focusing on matters of individual conscience, rather than adhering to the traditional leftist methods of social mobilization and appeals to collective interests. It positioned itself outside of politics, which had important implications for its credibility given the conflictual atmosphere fomented by the Cold War. The universality of its message was key to Benenson's vision, and shaped the demographic which selected into the organization. As Hopgood (2006, p. 57) suggests, Benenson understood quite well that the 1961 Appeal "…would attract precisely those *not* united be interests, identities, philosophy, or a god". For those disillusioned by politics or religion, especially those on the left,

[68] Benenson died on Friday 25th February 2005 in the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, UK.

Amnesty represented a new vehicle for participation and moral action. Many of the activists who filled Amnesty's ranks were internationalist and cosmopolitan in their outlook, and to whom the concept and vernacular of rights proved attractive.

Within two decades of its founding Amnesty had developed into a global voice in human rights protection, culminating with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977 and the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights in 1978. Its 1970 Annual Report provides an instructive signpost of this trajectory. By 1970 Amnesty had proliferated internationally to include 26 national sections, with the British, German, and Swedish sections particularly well-established. Cross-nationally there were 850 groups – the primary units of its activity – working on over 2,000 prisoner cases. Although Amnesty had a presence in countries such as India, Japan, and Pakistan, the eight-member International Executive Committee was exclusively European, indicative of the INGO's Eurocentrism. It is notable that, in the document's preamble, Amnesty specifically highlights Articles 5, 9, 18, and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). These articles cover freedom of expression, arbitrary detention, cruel and inhumane treatment, and torture. The inclusion of these articles exemplify how Amnesty's remit would expand to encompass multiple issues affecting POCs while, for the time being, constraining its work to a limited part of the UDHR (Amnesty 1970). Campaigning and legal departments were created to coordinate public action on torture, aspects of the organization's structure that have been retained to the present (Clarke 2001, p. 18). In a major boost to the group's prestige their work on torture, as well as their broader actions in "…the defence of human dignity and human rights", resulted in them winning the Nobel Peace Prize.[69] As the 1970s progressed, the issue of capital punishment became a central feature of Amnesty's work, another logical outgrowth of its focus on the plight of prisoners.

During this time Amnesty was not without internal frailties. In 1966 the group suffered an internal crisis when it was alleged that it had been infiltrated by British intelligence. It was also claimed that they transferred money, secretly procured from the British government, to the families of POCs in

[69] https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1977/ceremony-speech/

Rhodesia. Buchanan (2002, pp. 269-270) argues that failures in Benenson's domineering leadership style, as well as "inadequate internal accountability and financial controls", contributed to the crisis. The result was Benenson's resignation as President, a revised constitution, and a determination by Amnesty's leadership to professionalize its operations. Moreover, the expansion of Amnesty into other geographical areas, and the recruitment of members with experience working for other NGOs, created other problems. For instance, Amnesty International and its United States section endured fraught relations due to conflicting views over which model of activism the group should adopt. There were "…transatlantic disagreements about the efficacy of individual letter writing, funding, and the selection of prisoners of conscience" (Snyder 2012, p. 779). These growing pains speak to the difficulties of integrating different national sections – operating in their own political and cultural environment and with distinct domestic priorities – within a global organization, a challenge germane to matters of issue selection.

As Hopgood (2006, p. 10) observes, it was in the late 1970 and early 1980s that Amnesty "…reached the high phase of its symbolic moral authority." By this time Amnesty was a formidable global actor, surpassing half a million members and affiliates operating in over 150 countries. Despite its narrow issue focus, questions of prioritisation were salient both within and between issues. An expanding base meant that the organisational centre of gravity was pulled in competing directions. Almost half of member states of the United Nations were suspected of holding POCs. Staff and members sought to highlight abuses in their country or region of expertise, "the names are numerous; a few must stand as symbols for the rest".[70] The process behind issue prioritisation, as with the INGO more generally, remained haphazard and maladroit. Power (1981, p. 8) describes the Amnesty of the early 1980s as "still beguilingly amateurish". It lacked basic indicators of organizational competence, including a weekend duty officer or an answering service for calls that came in out of hours. Given its

[70] Taking from page 2 of Amnesty's 1984 Annual Report. For the full report, see here: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1000041984ENGLISH.PDF

international stature Amnesty's resources were modest, employing around 150 staff and operating on a budget of $4 million (Power 1981, p. 123).

We can trace the gradual fracturing and recasting of Amnesty's mission to this period. In the course of their research, staff had become aware of serious human rights abuses were occurring that bordered, but appeared to fall outside of, the INGO's core mandate. For example, Amnesty had accumulated detailed reporting on Brazil and, after many years of government torture, this particular form of abuse appeared to have ended. Amnesty staff were aware of other, significant abuses being perpetrated against vulnerable Brazilians, including the violent seizure of land from peasant populations. However, because this did not appear to be officially-sanctioned violence, and the peasants were not being held in jail, they could not be incorporated into Amnesty's records. The inability of Amnesty to take action on this kind of issue, where severe abuses were known to be occurring, was a cause for introspection for the group's leaders, including Secretary General Thomas Hammarberg. Amnesty increasingly faced a dilemma in how it viewed its remit and set its agenda. Taking the step to further expand the mandate, even if it is to include worthwhile human rights issues, was not a simple question. Amnesty's broad appeal was in part derived from its narrow focus on a set of key issues. Expanding the mandate could mean diluting its messaging and undermining the identity it had built up over decades (Power 1981, p. 124).

3.3 Toward a New Mandate

In the 1990s the mandate which shaped Amnesty's work came under increasing scrutiny. The end of the Cold War opened up new geographical and cultural spaces, and Amnesty faced growing criticism that its substantive focus remained too narrow. Internally, contentious debates were occurring between those who wished Amnesty to widen the scope of its work, and those who saw the retention of the mandate as central to the group's identity and reputation. This was not the first time such debates had taken place. In 1973 voices within the organization raises similar fears when the INGO

decided on unconditional opposition to the death penalty, an issue that later became synonymous with Amnesty. However, the pace and breadth of change that was on the table in the early 1990s was unprecedented.

In 1991 the International Council passed a resolution to consider for adoption individuals imprisoned on the basis of their sexual orientation. The resolution represented a major change for Amnesty, and was the culmination of more than 15 years of internal debate. Among other potential hurdles, opponents of the resolution argued that "lesbian and gay rights were not an accepted part of international human rights law, and…that the subject would alienate support in major parts of the world outside Europe and North America" (Sanders 1996, p. 103). The acceptance of the resolution marked the beginning of a period of transition on what issues Amnesty considered within its remit.

In 1993, Amnesty released a public campaign statement for UN World Conference on Human Rights. The text indicates an organization whose mandate was in the midst of evolution:

> "The universal aspiration for dignity and human rights lies at the heart of some of the most pressing questions confronting humanity today. Millions of people have been condemned to extreme poverty, disease and exploitation. Countries are disintegrating as war, famine and anarchy take their toll. Arbitrary arrest, political imprisonment, torture and death at the hands of the state have corrupted the life of scores of nations. Social injustice and intolerance are rampant and the international community has failed to protect those most at risk from oppression. We face the threat of a world devastated by the destruction of our environment."

It continued:

> "Neglect for the social, cultural and economic rights of millions, particularly in the poorest areas of the world has denied them those rights which the Declaration calls indispensable for dignity and the free development of the personality. Patterns of international political

> and economic inequality have served to create conditions in which an escape from this misery often seems impossible to bring about."[71]

Citing social, cultural, and economic rights, as well as issues such as poverty, disease, and the environment, was a clear break with Amnesty's strict focus on abuses of civil and political rights. It was followed by significant shifts in official policy. In the ensuing years, the INGO "expanded its work to include abuses committed by non-state actors, identity-based violations, women's rights, responses to mass human rights crises, and more recently in 2001, the advancement of economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights" (Thompson 2008, p. 327).

By focusing on a narrow set of human rights issues, Amnesty attracted criticism that it may be perceived as promoting an "unduly selective conception of human rights" (Kox 1999).[72] Amnesty's annual report in 1994 provides insight into the group's interpretation of events. It suggests that, in the post-Cold War world the human rights landscape was becoming more complicated, and that the INGO would need to adapt to these changes:

> "The patterns of human rights abuses that Amnesty International seeks to combat have become more and more complex in recent years… These horrific events illuminate the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights more powerfully than any abstract argument. In this increasingly volatile human rights environment, Amnesty International offers a structure for people from all continents to campaign for human rights and influence events worldwide as well as in their own regions."[73]

Debates over the Amnesty "mandate" – the basis and set of issues from which the INGO pursued its objectives – became a site of internal conflict between those who preferred its retention and a slower evolution of the group's scope, and those who wished to broaden it significantly. For many, including former Secretary General Thomas Hammarberg, "Amnesty's success was based on the focused

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[71] For the full statement, see: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/192000/ior410191992en.pdf
[72] Kox is quoting from Alston 1990.
[73] https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1000021994ENGLISH.PDF

mandate, impartiality, and factual information" (Hopgood 2006, p. 92). In the end, the reformers won out. In the ensuing years the extent of issues within Amnesty's revised mission has grown inordinately (see: Figure 3).

Figure 3: AI: Categories of Issue Coverage.

Armed Conflict	Arms Control	Climate Change	Corporate Accountability	Death Penalty
Detention	Disappearances	Discrimination	Freedom of Expression	Indigenous Peoples
International Justice	Living in Dignity	Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Migrants	Sexual & Reproductive Rights	Torture

Source: Amnesty International 2020.[74]

For the founders of Amnesty, the spectrum of issues the INGO now works on – climate change, sexual and reproductive rights, cultural rights, and corporate accountability, to name a few – would no doubt be surprising. It is in these years, which saw an unprecedented proliferation in human rights coverage, that we can trace the beginning of the serious selection dilemma now facing decision-makers. Corroborating this, senior officials in Amnesty during this period point to the post-Cold War period as a turning point with regard to agenda-setting. In an interview with a former Secretary General, the highest position in Amnesty, the official stated the following without probing: "in my day we had a defined mandate, but that has now been abandoned so that the question of selection becomes a major one" (Interview ID: A).[75] A senior policy advisor in the IS, with over two decades

[74] https://www.amnesty.org/en/who-we-are/. AI work on a large number of issues within these overarching categories. More detailed information on AI themes, as well as issue coverage within these categories, are contained in AI's Annual Reports.
[75] Interview ID: A. Former Secretary General of Amnesty International.

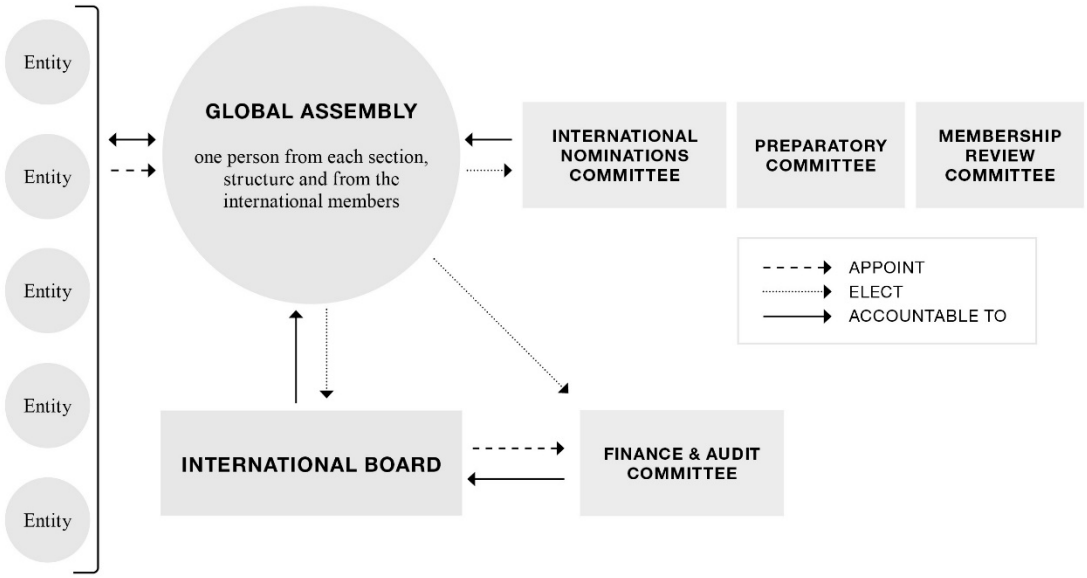
of service to Amnesty, echoed these sentiments, suggesting the group now faced a severe challenge in circumscribing its remit and choosing where to focus. The policy advisor noted, again without probing: "prioritization of issues used to be synonymous with the mandate, it used to be easy to say what we stood for" (Interview ID: M).[76] Both officials indicated that the INGO was no longer on sure footing when it came to selection, a scenario in concert with the expectations of the study's theory. Increasingly, the group faced difficult choices in adjudicating amongst substantively different issue options, a process exacerbated by a lack of standardized metrics or procedures of comparison.

3.4 Amnesty Today

Since the somewhat amateur practices that characterized the first two decades of its existence, Amnesty International has undergone significant development in available resources, the sophistication of its operations, and the complexity of its organizational structure. Financial reports from 2017 reveal the group raised almost €300 million in a single year, garnered from more than 2 million individuals.[77] These resources are used to support its global activities, including offices in 80 countries.[78] In terms of decision-making structures, Amnesty is led by a General Assembly composed of a representative from each section, structure[79] and the international members. The GA approves changes to Amnesty's statute as well as the global strategy. The nine-member international board, which is elected by the GA, oversees the practical fulfilment of the goals set down by the GA as well as the work of the International Secretariat (IS). The IS provides expert support to the constituent parts of AI, ensuring coherence in global output and broad alignment with the strategic goals.[80] An overview of AI governance is presented in Figure 4.

[76] Interview ID: M. Senior policy advisor and former unit director.
[77] https://www.amnesty.org/en/2017-global-financial-report/
[78] https://www.amnesty.ca/about-us/what-we-do/key-facts-about-amnesty-international#:~:text=Offices%20in%2080%20countries%20%2D%20Amnesty,48%20countries%20around%20the%20world
[79] Amnesty ascribes different designations to constituent parts of its global presence, denoting their status in the movement. These include sections, structures, as well as national and regional offices.
[80] Document shared with researcher.

Figure 4. Overview of AI Governance



Source: Amnesty International 2017.[81]

We may note several aspects of Amnesty's mode of governance that are of relevance to issue selection. Relative to other INGOs, including the other cases in this study, the process of selection is typically more convoluted in Amnesty. The group's overarching "Strategic Goals" are set and approved by the GA, providing a general impetus for members and staff. These aims tend to be broad, however, and are applied with greater specificity within national and regional sections, as well as other constituent entities. Depending on one's conception of selection, the analysis may centre on distinct processes of selection. Given that the present study is concerned with adjudication between substantive issue types, we are less concerned with the formation of the overarching goals – effectively broad enough for constituent bodies to adhere to their preferences – instead being focused on fields of attention chosen by decision-makers in the IS and thematic and geographical

[81] Document shared with researcher.

divisions. Furthermore, perhaps the most striking element of Amnesty's governance structure is its democratic ethos and inclusivity of ordinary members. When formulating priorities, the organization often engages in widespread consultation to gauge the views of members. As a consequence, there may arise a tension between the preferences of members and those of professional staff, including researchers with particular issue competencies. The role of the membership potentially adds an additional layer to the complexity to the ranking generation process in Amnesty.

This said, as intricate as AI's governance structure appears, officials within the INGO cautioned about overestimating structural effects on selection, as internal procedures were continually shifting in a manner independent of issue choices. When asked about the mechanisms of issue selection, a senior policy advisor and former unit director, who has worked at AI for over twenty years, stated the following without probing: "I would not take things [formal structures] too seriously, as things change a lot in terms of structures" (Interview ID: M).[82] This perspective was shared by another senior advisor, who has been directly involved in selection decisions from the first stage of research to policy adoption. The advisor noted that, while having a membership does complicate matters, "the overall structure is in perpetual motion" and was therefore of modest importance to selection (Interview ID: N).[83] A director in a large national section concurred with this assessment. Although it is true that members are an important dimension of AI and are consulted on decisions, the official emphasised that "this doesn't mean members will get their way", as staff try to steer outcomes in their preferred direction (Interview ID: P).[84] These responses were emblematic of the views of staff, suggesting that the nature of, and changes to, Amnesty's decisional structure has a minor role in shaping issue outcomes.

Another pertinent aspect of the organizational anatomy of Amnesty is the move – within the past two years – to develop procedures for evaluating impact and learning. To date, selection decisions have been made without critical information on the policy impact of various choices. This meant that

[82] Interview ID: M. Senior Policy Advisor in law and policy and former unit director.
[83] Interview ID: N. Senior Policy Advisor in the International Secretariat.
[84] Interview ID: P. Research Director in national section.

learning processes were often haphazard, being left to the discretion of individual officials within divisional units. The absence of systematic criteria for selection, and how this informs the selection dilemma faced by officials, is consistent with the expectations of the theory. Recognizing the problem, AI is now working to address it. Though at an incipient stage, the group has hired staff to formulate coherent mechanisms of monitoring, evaluation, and learning, which will aid future selection decisions. An official involved in overseeing this process in a major national section reflected that, due to the distinct nature of issue areas, creating systematic procedures for selection would be challenging, "we want a standardized methodology, but we also have to allow for the individuality of [thematic] units" (Interview ID: O).[85] As the official suggests, some areas of human rights protection lend themselves to measurement more easily than others. This perspective was shared by a senior policy advisor on research, who noted that "because human rights are so political, it is hard to come up with clear, objective standards" (Interview ID: N). Each thematic area will require contextual sensitivity in developing metrics of progress. How successful Amnesty will be in constructing these metrics, and how well they are applied to selection decisions between distinct issue types, is an uncertain question.

It is also worth remarking on the prevailing political context in which contemporary selection decisions take place. A deputy director, with more than 15 years' experience at Amnesty, likened the INGO to a "supertanker" in that changes and developments could be very slow to materialize (Interview ID: T).[86] Despite this, effort is made by Amnesty officials to be responsive to shifts in the political environment. "Unexpected events can change plans", a longstanding official and senior advisor in the IS remarked without probing, whether this be a humanitarian emergency or a change in government (Interview ID: N). One of the most consequential changes for Amnesty has been the election of Donald Trump as US president, as well the wider shift towards authoritarian nationalism in countries such as Brazil, India, and the Philippines. The policies and rhetoric of Trump have had a

[85] Interview ID: O. The official noted that progress markers would emanate from, and reflect the distinct nature of, the sections themselves.
[86] Deputy director in IS with more than 15 years service.

particularly salient effect on the work of Amnesty. These include the US pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement, violations of migrant rights at the US-Mexico border, the travel ban into the US, and the use of military personnel during crackdowns on protests.[87] Amnesty can no longer count on access to government officials in Washington, or to leverage those relationships to advance its own agenda. The organization has found itself on the backfoot in a number of policy areas, notably on climate and migrant rights, since 2016. It is within the context of the Trump era, and the re-orientation of Amnesty – particularly its USA section – in light of his election, that the findings of this chapter should be interpreted.

3.5 The Determinants of Issue Selection in Amnesty International

The ranking generation process in Amnesty may be regarded as, in contrast to many INGOs, a collaborative process involving professional staff, members, and volunteers. Depending on the nature of a prospective issue, such as whether or not it foments contention within the organization as to how it gels with Amnesty's mission, its trajectory from initial consideration to adoption may follow different institutional pathways. A senior management figure in the IS, who helps direct the implementation of global priorities, notes that if an issue is particularly contentious it goes through "a controlled environment" to be evaluated and potentially debated at the GA (Interview ID: R).[88] Another, perhaps more typical pathway, is for a proposed issue to be referred to constituent parts of the group to perform due diligence and checks. For instance, an issue proposed by a national or regional entity may be referred to a regional director, and subsequently to the law and policy team to acquire knowledge as to how it fits within the framework of human rights law. A senior policy advisor in the law and policy division explained that while a critical mass of the team is in London and the IS, they are also distributed regionally to cover time differences and promote a timely response. If there is lingering uncertainty surrounding an issue, the law and policy team may refer the

[87] For more information see: https://www.amnesty.org/en/search/?q=trump
[88] Member of senior management in International Secretariat.

issue upwards, "if we are not sure about an issue, we can refer it to the Secretary General, or it may come before the International Board" (Interview ID: M).[89]

Although the INGO has instituted procedures to resolve internal disagreements and legal uncertainty, the process of issue selection is often less convoluted. Because the global priorities are typically quite broad, and as "the mandate has ballooned" in the past twenty years, leading staff within national and regional bodies may wield considerable influence over issue choices (Interview ID: R). In a sense, the international architecture of the organization is misleading, as significant discretion is vested in the geographical and thematic units, a reflection of the expertise of researchers. This said, it would be similarly misleading to suggest professional staff have carte blanche in selection, as the consultation process with members can help direct priorities. Exemplifying this, when probed about potential conflict between staff experts and members, a director of research in a national section noted that the influence of members can be a source of frustration for experts. The official noted that staff may be required to move away from a familiar area of work to a new set of issues in light of members' preferences. Although it is not common, in the past this has led to issue specialists leaving Amnesty to take up a position with another INGO to continue their work. As a result, the hiring process has evolved to privilege staff that are capable and willing to work in more than one area, should priorities shift (Interview ID: P).

One of the most commonly cited factors when theorizing INGO behaviour is the role of donors. As the survival and operational capacities of many transnational actors are dependent on external funding, this may incentivise convergence of preferences between donor and recipient. Availability of and competition for restricted funding – financing where the issue has been selected by the donor – for specified projects may have a comparable effect. For Amnesty, as with any INGO, resources are finite and are a key consideration in choosing issues. However, the empirical evidence suggests that donor preferences may have, at most, a marginal effect on selection.

[89] Senior policy advisor in law and policy.

During the course of interviewing, the subject of donors was almost never raised by officials without probing or direct questioning on the topic. In the case of HRW, for example, the subject of donors was raised more frequently by officials, indicating that donors weigh more heavily on the reasoning process in HRW than they do in Amnesty. This might be explained by appealing to Amnesty's organizational make-up and, as a corollary, its associated funding streams. Its large membership base and international reputation translates into a significant resource pool, primarily made up of individual donations. When probed about the potential impact of donors on policy choices, a senior figure in the IS familiar with Amnesty's funding structure dismissed their influence, noting that "our funding is unrestricted" (Interview ID: R). Examining the group's 2017 financial report offers more detail on the breakdown of funding. Of €295 million accrued in that year, almost three-quarters of that figure acquired through individual donations and over 95% of it was unrestricted.[90] Combined with Amnesty's size and reputation as a respected voice for human rights, this means that, at a structural level, the INGO is relatively invulnerable to competitive financial pressures in its organizational environment and decision-makers are largely free to approach selection in a manner of their choosing.

Regarding motives for selection, a desire for impact was perhaps the most recurring consideration in organizational reports, recruitment and training materials, and among interview informants. Annual reports feature detailed information on how AI has sought and achieved impact. The INGO also publishes a dedicated impact report every year.[91] Across divisions, AI regularly publishes update briefs on achievements in impact, such as the release of prisoners, cessation of abuses, or changes to law or business practices.[92] A research director in a national section exemplified responses in staff interviews, suggesting that the probability of realizing impact was an important aspect of the "section-based protocols" they endeavour to follow.[93] The former Secretary General noted that

[90] https://www.amnesty.org/en/2017-global-financial-report/
[91] For an example, see: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2019/11/the-not-enough-impact-report-201819/
[92] A sample brief, in relation to impact in Argentina: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/six-months-of-human-rights-wins-worth-celebrating/
[93] Interview ID: P.

impact was at the core AI's work, both historically and in recent years, "For Amnesty it is not just about asking 'what is right' but 'what can we achieve and for whom?"'.[94] Of course, the salience of this determinant appears dependent on the area of the organization in which one works. While campaigners think a great deal about impact, "researchers produce research first, which is less about impact".[95]

Despite the clear emphasis on impact in interviews, there are two caveats worth noting on this potential determinant. One of the purposes of instituting more standardized mechanisms of monitoring, evaluation, and learning in the INGO is the feeling among senior management that current patterns of issue selection are too divorced from impact. In fact, for officials involved in this project in both the IS and national/thematic entities, efforts to define impact in the first instance are on-going. This indicates that while staff are cognisant of its importance, processes of issue selection to date appear to be out of sync with this aspiration (Interview ID: O). In addition, impact may be a general guiding rule for decision-makers, but its importance is contingent. Initial decisions to adopt a policy on a topic, or to incorporate it within existing agendas, may reflect how officials situate a given issue within human rights law. In this sense, impact may come into play later in the advocacy process, when officials are making decisions on where to allocate resources, rather than in the initial selection decision. Impact therefore seems to be a key general criterion, but – as officials lament – the organization is working to ensure it plays a larger role in selection than it has thus far, and it is certainly not the only factor affecting issue outcomes.

Despite the relative complexity of AI's architecture, there is evidence that heuristics may affect selection. A unit director in a major section, who regularly consults with researchers and campaigners across thematic divisions – especially well-placed to comment on general patterns of selection – gave insight into its main determinants. When asked what they thought typically drove selection, the first

[94] Interview ID: B.
[95] Interview ID: P. Research Director in national section.

and primary factor the official cited was a personal connection between staff and the issues they desired to work on. The director explained motivations as follows, without probing:

> "There's a lot of people that feel strongly about an issue that might be very personal to them. They might have a story [involving a particular issue]. Human rights tends to be something that is so personal. I think anyone joining a human rights organization, sometimes you know, they have a story behind why they want to do the work that they're doing. It is usually not 'I want to work at Amnesty because it is Amnesty', they usually have a very strong connection to it".[96]

The status of the official as a key informant, as well as the nature of their response without probing, provides important evidence which aligns with the implications of the affect heuristic. Personal experience of, and a connection with, specific issues appears to motivate selection among members and staff. The contemporary push for increased monitoring and evaluation relates to this tendency, as the same official noted, "it is important to do work that is effective. Just because something is right, or feels right, doesn't mean that it will have an impact".[97] Moreover, the tendency toward affective feeling driving behaviour may extend beyond staff, to the organizations members. It is highly plausible that members – who lack the professional training and expertise of paid researchers and other officials – are even more susceptible to heuristic-led judgments, and that preferences will pertain to salient issues for them. It is for this reason that Amnesty harnesses campaigns on specific issues to reach new audiences and attract potential members.[98]

Learning processes also play an important role in selection. Staff were motivated to learn what aspects of work were being done well, how issues fit within their remit and agenda, and if impact was being achieved. To date, however, learning processes in AI have been haphazard, largely left to staff in individual units without organizational oversight. One senior official, who manages a large team of

[96] Interview ID: O.
[97] Interview ID: O.
[98] An example of this is the campaign by Amnesty USA on gun control, discussed below.

researchers, characterized learning in AI as "more of an art than a science".[99] This was corroborated by other divisional managers and staff who stated that, although learning conversations took place, they were uneven across units and largely driven by individual staff who cared about it. The descriptions of disorderly learning, as well as a heightened role of individual agents within AI, is consistent with use of the representative heuristic.

Exploring the adoption of a recent, specific issue by AI is instructive to understand the potential effect of heuristics. Consider the decision of the AIUSA, a large national section, to select the issue of gun violence in the United States. In 2016, AIUSA released a report entitled "In the Line of Fire: Human Rights and the U.S. Gun Violence Crisis", declaring gun violence a "human rights crisis" and outlining a set of policy recommendations.[100] The decision to work on gun violence was a break from existing policy; AI was initially uncertain how the issue related to an international human rights law framework. Why did the section decide to pursue this issue? A senior researcher at AIUSA, who was involved in deliberations surrounding the policy, highlighted a number of factors. Younger members were especially motivated for AI to do something on gun violence, as they felt the issue more personally. They were more likely to be impacted by school shootings, and were alarmed at the increased, prison-like securitization of schools. Although gun violence affects many facets of US society, the alarming stories and experiences of mass shootings in schools across the US played a significant part in driving selection.[101] That the issue was unconventional for AIUSA was ultimately deemed inconsequential, as members felt something had to be done to reduce the violence. This aspect of the evidence is consistent with the role of both availability and affect in the decision-making process. The constant spectre of violence and securitization of schools in news reports appears to

[99] Interview ID: P.
[100] Amnesty 2016a.
[101] Media coverage helped to heighten the issue in the public mind. However, while media consumption crossed demographics, it was younger members who demanded action. Media may have contributed to selection, but the fact it did not shift older members or staff to the same degree suggests the disposition of younger members affected preference outcomes.

have made the issue more vivid for AI officials, while the strong feelings of younger members galvanized the INGO to act.

To situate domestic firearms policy within a human rights framework, staff also drew on analogies to existing work AI was engaged in. This was evident in the documentary record, where AI contextualized the issue as follows:

> "In the past, Amnesty International has developed recommendations…in relation to the use of force, including specifically the use of firearms and other lethal force, by state actors and armed groups in situations of armed conflict, and in relation to the use of force by state agents in law enforcement. Amnesty International also has long-standing positions on states' obligations to regulate the transfer of arms where there is a substantial risk of them being used to commit or facilitate serious human rights violations…".[102]

By drawing analogies between domestic gun policy and the use of force by states and armed groups during armed conflict, as well as the arms trade, officials categorized the former issue among severe and large-scale abuses of human rights. This process of analogizing was also evident from the interview with the AIUSA researcher who, without probing, cited the arms trade and armed conflict as reference points during decision-making.[103] Of course, it seems a conceptual stretch to compare US domestic gun laws to extra-judicial killing during conflicts or the arms trade. This suggests the representative heuristic may have been at work. By comparing gun violence to broader, serious categories of human rights abuses, the issue appears to have gained impetus for selection.

This said, heuristics also appear to have been working in conjunction with another factor, which hints at the presence of instrumental motives. Later in the interview, the same official explained that action on gun violence not only allowed AIUSA to lead on an issue that had yet to develop a human rights dimension, but was viewed by the executive director as an opportunity to increase exposure and attract new members, "the previous executive director also saw the issue as an opportunity to

[102] Amnesty 2016a: 9.
[103] Interview ID: Q.

increase the size of our membership but also the diversity of our membership as well."[104] The heuristics-led judgments of members and staff appears to have aligned with a material incentive to widen the base of the INGO, ultimately contributing to selection. The decision of AIUSA to adopt a policy on gun control is an instructive example of how heuristics may impact judgments, but not necessarily in isolation.

In general, however, the impact of instrumental factors such as public opinion and media coverage on selection appears marginal. The logic of collecting 'easy wins' to minimize risks and output and optimize returns – members, reputation, and finances – appears incongruent with the empirical evidence of how decision-makers reason through issue options. Again, the structure, vast – and idealist – membership, and broad distribution of constituent entities within the organization, adds a layer of accountability and means the rationalization of issue priorities must align closely to the group's human rights objectives. As noted, AI's large size and reputation in the human rights sector renders it insensitive to the preferences of external actors, such as the media and general public. When developing planning strategies for the forthcoming cycle of activities, and making ultimate decisions between prospective issues, these constituencies are largely absent from discussions.[105] Of course, this does not mean that Amnesty is unaware of popular trends and, all things being equal, endeavour to plug selected issues within these trends. A director of research in a national section posited that these factors may not drive selection, but may enter into considerations:

> "If you're looking at the criteria for selecting research, the criteria definitely is: 'is this something Amnesty can add value [to], is this something that can deliver human rights impact?' If it is something that we can potentially raise funds on then great. We have to pay the researchers to do the work, or pay to keep the lights on. Will it have impact on media

[104] Interview ID: Q.
[105] Interview ID: R. Director in International Secretariat.

> visibility?...Those are considerations, but I wouldn't say those are the drivers of any decision-making".[106]

One way we might make inferences about motivations for easy wins, as well as the potential effect of external constituencies on policy choices, is to empirically examine the kinds of issues that are selected. One limitation of interview data is the difficulty in examining and – where relevant – separating stated and actual preferences. INGO officials may have incentives to downplay instrumental concerns when speaking with researchers. For example, if it was publicly known that a human rights group like Amnesty placed emphasis on the procurement of resources, while subordinating more ethical considerations, it would potentially damage the organization's reputation and funding streams. What do trends in issue uptake by Amnesty suggest about the motives of decision-makers?

Examining the empirical record, the stated interpretation of primary motives proffered by interview participants appears to be borne out by patterns of selection. AI has initiated and maintained activities on many issues that attract negligible attention and funding from external actors. One example of this work is Amnesty's research and campaigning on oil spills, pollution, judicial impropriety, the destruction of livelihoods, and corporate accountability in the Niger Delta, a centre of oil production in Africa. In conjunction with partner organizations and online volunteers,[107] AI helped produce a sophisticated project to track the nature and scope of oil spills in the region. This allowed the INGO to challenge the damaging practices of powerful companies such as Shell and Eni, pressurise them to provide restitution for affected peoples, and highlight the unlawful abuses – both corporate and government – of indigenous residents and farmers. The uptake of an issue little known among broad international publics, which affected vulnerable and marginalized groups with little representation, and which had no major backing by external financiers – that Amnesty did not have sufficient resources to analyse oil spill data

[106] Interview ID: P.

[107] Amnesty enlisted the help of online volunteers to analyse significant amounts of data on oil spills and help uncover false claims on the source and extent of the spills by corporate perpetrators.

and relied on the labour of online volunteers attests to this – suggests that instrumental concerns was not the primary driver of decision-making. Moreover, due to the complexity of the issue, the indifference of Western media, problems of local governance, and the difficulty in apportioning legal blame to the oil companies, it was certainly not axiomatic to officials that Amnesty would secure a clear 'win' or garner positive material benefits from its activities on the issue. The facts surrounding Amnesty's work on this issue clearly violate the expectations of an account of selection emphasising organizational self-interest.

Equally, we can observe similar patterns in the wider issue portfolio of the INGO. The death penalty, for instance, has been a longstanding part of Amnesty's organizational agenda, and the INGO is unlikely to abandon the issue in forthcoming years. As a senior research figure in Amnesty USA acknowledged, working on the death penalty "is not a big money-maker" for the group, and staff appear generally pessimistic about the probability of the death penalty being outlawed in the US.[108] Despite this, staff and affiliates of the INGO remain steadfastly in favour of retaining the issue. It is viewed as part of the DNA of the group, as well as key to its human rights convictions. This long-term commitment to ending the death penalty globally is reflected in the documentary record through staff training materials,[109] as well as in materials generates through research and reporting. In 2020, Amnesty published its latest comprehensive global report for the year ending in 2019, entitled "Death Sentences and Executions".[110] The report includes detailed regional and national breakdowns of government behaviour on the death penalty, including the tracing of longitudinal trends. Data is gathered from a variety of sources, ranging from official figures to media reports and testimony from those sentenced and their families. The generation of this level of reportage, produced annually over several decades,

[108] Interview ID: P.
[109] https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/death-penalty-training-pack#.Vmg1hdKLSUk
[110] https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ACT5018472020ENGLISH.PDF

suggests Amnesty's commitment to the issue beyond calculations of material returns, which have remained comparatively low.[111]

In addition, Amnesty's research and campaign work on the plight of global indigenous communities – groups often within the bracket of extreme poverty and disenfranchisement – appears largely thankless from the perspective of instrumental gains. Amnesty's work promoting the land rights of the Sengwer people in the Embobut Forest in Kenya is an instructive example. The INGO has invested resources to investigate and highlight abuses perpetrated against the Sengwer, including physical attacks and forced evictions. In 2018 Amnesty produced a substantial report on the light of the Sengwer. Information compiled in the report included data collected by a team of Amnesty researchers who travelled to the region to collect direct testimony. It also included expert analysis of legal documentation pertaining to the case, as well as of photo and video evidence and satellite imagery.[112] The selection of the issue, and the production of this detailed report, signifies that Amnesty officials were willing to choose and invest in an issue to advocate for a community with few prospects of material returns to the INGO. While instrumental motives will no doubt vary by issue area, and may correlate with the financial exigencies of keeping the organization working effectively over time – it would be naïve to rule out this tendency – these examples highlight the limitations of explanations for selection that are grounded in material incentives for action.

3.6 Selecting Workers' Rights: Sex Work and the Textile Industry

We can trace the emergence and development of sex workers' rights and the decriminalization policy as an issue of consideration for Amnesty to the early 2000s. For several decades of Amnesty's operations, women's rights were viewed as tangential to, or outside of, the purview of human rights organizations. In tandem with an expanding perception of its remit, the period following the end of

[111] Interview ID: P.
[112] The report can be accessed here: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR3283402018ENGLISH.PDF

the Cold War saw Amnesty begin to devote "…more resources and organisational attention to the violations of women's rights that fall within its mandate" (Watson 1997). Having re-evaluated the place of women's rights within their mission, Amnesty established a unit dedicated to the relationship between gender and human rights. In the early 2000s, reports produced on violence against women began to flag to researchers the violence and ill-treatment which sex workers were commonly victim to. It was at this time that we may also observe an evolving understanding of how Amnesty, and the human rights movement in general, conceived of torture and how breaches of physical integrity rights such as rape and sexual extortion fit with this changing interpretation. As part of a global campaign against torture,[113] Amnesty launched a 2001 report examining the torture and abuse of women specifically. The contents of the report convey how Amnesty's understanding of torture was shifting from conventional abuses perpetrated by state actors, to bridge the divide between public and private spaces:

> "Sometimes the perpetrators of acts of violence against women are agents of the state, such as police officers, prison guards or soldiers. Sometimes they are members of armed groups fighting against the government. However, much of the physical, mental and sexual abuse faced by women is at the hands of people they know, such as husbands, fathers, employers or neighbours."[114]

On the back of these developments, sex workers' rights became a more salient point of concern for researchers. More tangibly, it was in February 2013 that the subject began to be discussed more seriously, with conversations taking place within the gender and law and policy units. Neglect of the issue was a recurring theme for officials; its absence from internal policy frameworks became conspicuous through research and campaigning work on a host of adjacent topics, such as abortion, adultery laws, HIV, and same-sex marriage. A senior policy advisor at AI, who helped lead the development of the sex work policy, noted that staff began to make associations between the rights

[113] The campaign was entitled "Take a step to stamp out torture" and was launched in October 2000. More information can be viewed here: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT40/013/2000/en/
[114] https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/120000/act400012001en.pdf

of sex workers and abuses related to the criminalization of LGBTI people, police violence, and torture. The advisor suggested that the perceived similarities and intersection of these issues fomented a feeling of negligence on the issue of sex work and helped drive selection:

> "Amnesty had already done a campaign on violence against women. We've also got a huge body of work around police violence and torture…As we started to do more women's rights work, we started to see more intersection between them. I think there was recognition that we had come across this issue of sex workers, there were a huge amount of parallels with [the criminalization of] LGBTI communities, and we were perhaps dealing with it in a superficial and inconsistent way".[115]

Preference formation on sex workers rights appears indicative of the representative heuristic. Key to the decision was AI's knowledge of the relationship between criminalization of LGBTI communities and increases in police violence. According to the advisor: "We increasingly realized that criminalization of same-sex relationships was leading to police violence…and there were massive parallels with sex workers".[116] The official explained that, by contextualizing sex work within the parameters of police violence and other forms of egregious violence, such as torture, the issue began to gain salience among staff. The evidence suggests that analogies to the violent consequences of the criminalization of LGBTI people, as well as to victims of torture, contributed to a heightened assessment of the risks criminalization posed to sex workers. Why the comparison to abuses of LGBTI rights? The fact that AI had stepped up its work on LGBTI rights in preceding years, and the comparison was thus readily available in memory, appears to be one determining factor.

The first initiative on sex workers was proposed by a member of law and policy team, who sought clarification on how the issue fit within frameworks of human rights law. The advisor noted that "it usually takes an individual" to get policy action moving at AI.[117] And while this individual agency is

[115] Interview ID: T. Senior policy advisor.
[116] Interview ID: T.
[117] Interview ID: T.

consistent with the study's theory, the decision to proceed with the policy encompassed factors beyond the motivations of one individual. Having agreed to investigate the issue further, AI carried out extensive consultation with outside experts, conducted its own research, and examined a number of case studies, including in Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong, Norway, and Argentina.[118] The evidence gathered in these case studies made it apparent to officials that current legal and political frameworks that governed the rights of sex workers was leading to pervasive harm – indeed, in its referral to the International Board to enact a decriminalization policy on sex work, the movement directly referenced "the harm reduction principle".[119] For example, its report on Hong Kong, entitled "Harmfully Isolated: Criminalizing Sex Work in Hong Kong", it is clear that the role of violence in the ill-treatment of sex workers was of paramount important to Amnesty officials. The report's assessment of abuses perpetrated by clients highlights, first and foremost, how sex workers – especially those who must work in isolation – are at serious risk of murder, rape, sexual assault, and other forms of violence.[120] Moreover, parallels were found across each of the case reports, informing the decriminalization policy:

> "Across the four locations, in spite of strikingly different economic, social and cultural backdrops and different legal frameworks, sex workers told us stories of exploitation, harassment and violence. It is these stories, and these voices, that have helped guide Amnesty International in formulating its policy on protecting sex workers from human rights violations and abuses which is also published today."[121]

It was therefore on the basis of extensive cross-national research that the decriminalization policy was adopted. The alarming and consistent stories of violent suffering by vulnerable women seems to have played a key part in the decision to select the issue. AI staff knew that the policy would cause a public backlash against the organization, as policy attitudes in the women's movement were deeply

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[118] Amnesty 2016b.
[119] https://www.amnesty.org/en/policy-on-state-obligations-to-respect-protect-and-fulfil-the-human-rights-of-sex-workers/
[120] https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1740322016ENGLISH.PDF
[121] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/out-of-the-shadows-fighting-for-the-rights-of-sex-workers/

divided. However, having invested so extensively in its fact-finding, the group was confident that its proposals would lessen harm to sex workers. AI was thus willing to endure probable damage to its reputation, as well as risk friction with organizational partners and governments.[122]

Examining the trajectory of the issue from inception to selection, the process of preference formation seems, in various ways, congruent with the use of heuristics and ultimately with the observable implications theory. The part played by a small group of individuals, notably those in the gender and law and policy teams, who pressed for the organization to take action on the issue is consistent with the role of key decision-makers in selection. It is also clear that analogies drawn between sex work and serious abuses in extant issue areas, such as matters surrounding LGBTI people, police violence, and torture, helped to elevate the salience of sex work in the minds of officials. This comparative mode of reasoning seems indicative of the representative heuristic. Similarly, the emphasis placed on quite vivid forms of suffering by sex workers, such as murder and sexual and physical assault, suggests that availability may have affecting choice outcomes. This said, we must also contextualize the adoption of the decriminalization policy within larger trends, emergent since the Cold War, of women's rights getting an increased hearing within human rights INGOs. Amnesty's later approach to tackling sex work seems predicated on these developments, including the recruitment of specialized teams and building of internal competencies to investigate women's rights. The widening of contemporary understandings of torture and comparative analysis to sex work therein – abuses of sex workers were increasingly adjudged to qualify as torture – as well as empirical findings on harm reduction during an elaborate consultation and research process, also appear to have been crucial factors in selection.

How might we explain the absence of textile workers from AI's agenda? The methodology of the business and human rights division, which made the decision, emphasises a number of criteria in selecting issues. As with other teams, the potential for impact is an important consideration. Whether the issue is timely, emblematic of a broader pattern of abuse, or is pervasive in scale, are factors also

[122] Interview ID: E.

weighed by decision-makers. In line with expectations for the availability heuristic, the team categorizes the severity of an issue in terms of both scale and the *nature* of the abuse. If an issue involves violence or physical harm, even if it only effects a small number of people, it will be more likely to be prioritized.[123] In practice, while the division responds to a general mandate derived from the movement and co-ordinates its decisions with regional sections, the agenda is set by the business and human rights team, with the head of division particularly influential. Typically, discussions on agenda-setting begin within the division, with team members proposing and evaluating potential issue options. Once a prospective issue has been selected – the divisional leader has a significant say in this choice – the division will reach out to relevant regional teams and country researchers to assess and procure organizational alignment on the issue. At this stage, the business and human rights team may send an official of their own to conduct research at relevant sites, though the process is often collaborative.

Where the division pitches a potential issue for selection, they may collaborate with teams that share thematic overlap. Again, human rights violations that involve threats to physical integrity rights appear to aid collaboration and correlate with selection. For example, proposals from the business and human rights team to investigate abuses in the diamond supply chain in the Central African Republic – a country that has, since 2012, experienced major armed conflict between government forces and rebel militias – were met positively by Amnesty officials involved in researching conflict. The intersection of abusive business practices with a conflict environment appears to have been conducive to selection in this case. This ostensible logic is evident in the resultant report "Chains of Abuse: The global diamond supply chain and the case of the Central African Republic", where the impact of violent actors is framed at the forefront of abuses during diamond extraction and supply:

[123] A staff member gave the example of an acid attack on a small number of protesting workers. The vivid and physical nature of attacks such as this would outweigh the lack of scale in the numbers affected. In their reports, the business and human rights division include information on their methodology. See: https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/business-and-human-rights

> "Armed groups, criminal gangs, corrupt elites and unscrupulous companies all feed off the mineral trade and have removed vast wealth from developing economies over the years through a range of illegal and/or unethical practices. Consequently local people rarely see significant benefits from mineral extraction but often have to live with the human rights impacts of pollution, conflict and exploitation."[124]

The decision to select diamond supply chains in CAR as a site of inquiry meant substantial investments in research. Staff travelled to the Western part of the country to interview diamond miners and traders in several towns. The stark nature of the human rights violations – perpetrated against some of the world's poorest communities – and the drawing of connections between diamond extraction and abuses of physical integrity appears to have a key to the decision to adopt the issue. Many of those involved in the "upstream" aspects of diamonds in CAR, such as extraction and sorting, are coerced and extorted by armed groups such as the Séléka, who have been implicated in war crimes and crimes against humanity. The conflict dimension of the process means the product is often characterized as "conflict" or "blood" diamonds, again indicative of how violent action is especially salient for decision-makers.[125] This is quite consistent with the use of the availability heuristic.

When asked about what underlies the priorities of the business and human rights division, a senior figure in the division – who is involved in selection decisions – noted that, to date, they have tended to focus on extractive industries – e.g. oil, gas, and mining – over textiles. The official cited the likelihood of finding severe abuses in extractive industries as a central reason for this trend:

> "There are areas and industries where the risk of human rights abuses, and the severity of the abuses, is bigger. Extractives is one of those industries. We know there are human rights

[124] https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR1924942015ENGLISH.PDF
[125] Ibid. See p.11 of report.

> issues with arms trading, tobacco, agriculture, but extractives is basically one that is quite well known to be high-risk in terms of the human rights abuses that are affiliated with it."[126]

At times, criteria for selection in the unit can enter into tension. For instance, the team endeavours to work on timely issues, but recognizes that longer term projects are more conducive to impact. AI has maintained work for several years on issues such as oil spills in the Niger delta and cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the aim of producing impact. Similarly, co-ordinating with other groups may increase the probability of policy change by an offending business, but the team also aims to focus on areas that are not currently covered by other INGOs. It is this latter consideration, in part, that swayed the division against working on abuses in textile factories. The same senior figure, who helped lead the decision on textiles, recalled the rationale:

> "We had [the business and human rights team] lots of discussions about textiles, but there are so many NGOs in the textiles space. Not just NGOs, but really great NGOS. We came to the issue late, really. We have to ask what our added value is, and make the decision on what is the best use of our resources."[127]

Surveying the advocacy network surrounding textiles, it is certainly true that several reputable organizations and activist entities are active on this issue. For instance, two significant reports on rights violations in the garments and footwear industries were produced by a coalition of groups in 2017 and 2019. The reports were co-produced by bodies such as Human Rights Watch, the Clean Clothes Campaign, the Maquila Solidarity Network, the Workers' Rights Consortium, and the International Trade Union Confederation, among other entities.[128] The evidence therefore adds credence to the claim that issue coverage in the INGO network shaped non-selection of textiles. The

[126] Interview ID: S.
[127] Interview ID: S.
[128] The reports can be accessed here: https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/04/20/follow-thread/need-supply-chain-transparency-garment-and-footwear-industry and here: https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/12/18/fashions-next-trend/accelerating-supply-chain-transparency-apparel-and-footwear.

presence of competent INGOs active on that issue appears to have altered officials' calculations as to the potential value that Amnesty could bring to the table.

On the other hand, during interviewing the official also acknowledged that, should the INGO be approached by an external body to investigate specific abuses in the textile industry, they may well do so. If an individual team member was particularly passionate and knowledgeable about the issue, this may have been enough to bring the issue onto Amnesty's agenda. This information speaks to the contingent nature of selection and, even within Amnesty's complex decisional architecture, how the discretion of individuals and small groups can have a substantial effect on policy outcomes. These structures can allow considerable flexibility for divisions, in particular unit directors and team-leads, to set their preferred agenda.[129]

3.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the reasons for action and causal factors that underpin contrasting patterns of issue selection in Amnesty International. Amnesty is perhaps the world's foremost human rights INGO, making the chapter's findings of eminent policy relevance in for the human rights network. By virtue of its global presence and large membership base, as well as its complex internal structure, Amnesty represents perhaps the hardest test of the study's theory among the three case studies. The chapter has provided background particulars on the origin and development of Amnesty, including insights on the INGO's mechanics of selection. With this contextual information delineated in some detail, we may focus here on what the empirical evidence suggests are the key factors which determine issue outcomes.

In line with the theory, officials are readily aware that the proliferation of issue coverage and expansion of Amnesty's mission from the 1990s onwards has produced a selection dilemma. In light of the expanded mission and commitment to the indivisibility of human rights, is unclear to members

[129] Interview ID: S.

of senior management staff – both past and present – on what foundation the organization can adjudicate between issue types and justify its priorities. The dilemma is exacerbated by the fact Amnesty currently lacks coherent mechanisms for evaluating impact and organizational learning. To date, selection decisions have been made without critical information on the societal impact of various policy choices. This has meant learning processes are haphazard, being left to the discretion of individual officials within divisional units. The absence of systematic criteria for selection, in conjunction with the selection dilemma faced by officials, requires decisions to be made on limited data, and is this highly consistent with the use of heuristics. Having recognized the problem, Amnesty has hired staff to formulate coherent mechanisms of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Although at an early stage of development, these steps may go some way to alleviating the problem of missing information and may ease issue comparisons for future selection decisions.

In terms of reasons for action, policy impact was perhaps the most recurring factor in both interviews and the documentary record. This salience of this factor is evident from its prominence in divisional research, recruitment and training materials, and in annual reports. The INGO also publishes a dedicated impact report every year. Almost every official interviewed cited impact as a key consideration, a perspective neatly summarized by a former Secretary General: "For Amnesty it is not just about asking 'what is right' but 'what can we achieve and for whom?'".[130] In addition, the personal convictions of members and Amnesty staff appears to be a key factor in issue uptake. A key informant who works across multiple teams, and is thus uniquely placed to evaluate general determinants, suggested that a personal connection between staff and the issues they wished to see selected – such as if they had experience of particular rights violation – was a recurring theme in their interactions with people in the movement. Given that this information was offered without probing, and its close alignment with the implications of the affect heuristic, it does appear to indicate that affective response may shape selection outcomes.

[130] Interview ID: B.

The chapter also finds evidence for the use of the availability and representative heuristics. This tendency is illustrated by the decision by Amnesty USA to work on domestic gun violence, an issue area traditionally quite far outside the remit of the INGO. By drawing on analogies between domestic gun policy in the US and the use of force by states and armed groups during armed conflict, as well as the arms trade, officials categorized the former issue among severe and large-scale abuses of human rights. This categorization of gun violence among major forms of rights violations – despite the transparent differences between them – appears to have aided selection. Furthermore, the alarming stories and spectre of mass shootings in schools across the US played a significant part in driving selection. That the issue was unconventional for AIUSA was ultimately deemed inconsequential, as members felt something had to be done to reduce the violence. This aspect of the evidence is consistent with the role of both availability and affect in the decision-making process. Also, the strong feelings of younger members, a constituency deeply affected by the violence, galvanized the INGO to take action, a further potential indicator of the causal role of affective response.

In the paired comparison, availability and representativeness also seems relevant to the adoption of the policy on the decriminalization of sex work. It appears clear that analogies drawn between sex work and serious abuses in extant issue areas within Amnesty's issue portfolio, such as matters surrounding LGBTI people, police violence, and torture, helped to elevate the salience of sex work in the minds of officials. This comparative reasoning seems indicative of the representative heuristic. Similarly, the emphasis placed on quite vivid forms of suffering by sex workers, such as murder and sexual and physical assault, suggests that availability may have affecting choice outcomes. The part played by a small group of individuals, notably those in the gender and law and policy teams, who pressed for the organization to take action on the issue is consistent with the general precepts of the theory in respect of the role of key decision-makers. However, it is less apparent that the non-adoption of issues affecting textile workers can be accounted for by heuristic-led judgments. While connections to violent abuses may have been harder to make in the case of textiles, the fact that the

issue was already well covered by other groups in the human rights network appears to have been a decisive consideration for officials.

Finally, the data casts doubt on explanations pertaining to instrumental incentives. The nature of Amnesty's funding structure, which is largely unrestricted and therefore lacks a tight link between donor and issue choice, allows the organization considerable independence from donors. Indeed, without probing the subject of donors was barely broached by officials in the interviews. The group's large membership and respected reputation appears to allow it to accrue significant finances without having to make alterations its agenda. And yet, the group is not completely insensitive to the preferences of potential members; it may use campaigns on certain issues to try and recruit new members, though staff were quite adamant this did not drive selection. Moreover, factors such as the media and public opinion appear to have a negligible impact on selection. Simply put, Amnesty have selected and maintain substantial work on a large number of issues – from the death penalty to oil spills in the Niger Delta – that correlate poorly with media and public attention. This speaks to the limitations of explanations for selection that are grounded in instrumental motives on the part of officials.

In its totality, despite being a hard test for the theory, the study's argument stands up relatively well against the empirical evidence in the case of Amnesty International. Of course, heuristics are not the only factors that will impact issue selection. The evidence suggest that access to reliable information, policy impact, and issue coverage by other INGOs, may all contribute to decision-makers' reasoning. A complete picture of selection must acknowledge these factors.

Chapter 4: Case Study II - Human Rights Watch

4.1 Introduction

For the past thirty years, HRW has been considered a global leader in the field of human rights. It is a prominent voice in media and international politics, as well as being a key player in the development and enforcement of human rights norms. Clifford Bob (2009, p. 36) characterizes HRW as a "major gatekeeper", given its "…credibility and access to the media and governmental institutions…[and] their support for a new human rights issue can have tremendous impact on its international recognition." Due to the INGO's prominence, its choice outcomes also tend to have downstream effects on the agenda of the broader human rights network (Bob 2009, pp. 36-37). The group adheres to a three-step model of advocacy – investigate, expose, and change. This framework combines rigorous investigation of human rights violations, the publicizing of results in reports and other media output, as well as leveraging their influence to promote compliance and accountability among perpetrators, such as governments, armed groups, and corporations,[131] As a comparatively small INGO with a broad substantive remit of human rights issues, and given it operates with a professional staff in a hierarchical – if decentralized – structure, HRW represents an easier test for the proposed theory than the previous case study.

Selection is a salient topic across multiple levels of HRW. The establishment of thematic program divisions, such as those dedicated to women's rights (formed in 1990) or the environment (formed in 2016), as well as the proliferation of regional offices, represent significant acts of selection,[132] as they have embedded discrete preferences in the anatomy of the organization. However, as issue and geographic coverage has expanded, it is at the level of the division and region that the majority of selection decisions now take place. At this level, the identification of topics for investigation, the

[131] https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/howwework/index.html
[132] For an overview of HRW's timeline, see: https://www.hrw.org/about-us. More information on the thematic programs of HRW can be viewed under the "Topics" tab.

production of internal and public-facing output, and the co-ordination of lobbying efforts, all require acts of prioritization. To delimit the scope of the analysis, the chapter shall focus on selection decisions within the thematic and regional teams. In practical terms this means that, rather than assessing whether topics such as women's rights or environmental rights are given more weight in HRW, empirical investigation will centre on the prioritization of specific human rights issues within these overarching categories. The chapter begins by analysing general patterns of issue selection. It also carries out within-case analysis of an issue pair. The issues examined are attacks on education (positive) and child sex trafficking (negative). Both issues are thematically consistent, situated under the category of children's rights, and involve the same set of decision-makers, controlling for potentially important confounders.

One of the main analytical challenges in the chapter on HRW relates to timing. How HRW staff conceive of human rights, as well as their own responsibilities in promoting compliance, has been, and continues to be, subject to change over time. The institutional framework, mode of deliberation, and (in)formal selection criteria through which HRW arrive at issue priorities have proven similarly mutable. At the time of research, the group was engaged in a comprehensive process of internal review. Across an approximately nine-month period, staff at all levels have deliberated over potential areas of organizational reform. One of the desired outcomes of the review is to move toward a systematic and streamlined method of issue selection, where divisional priorities complement an overarching strategic plan at the organizational level. At the time of writing the outcome of the review process remains uncertain, as is the timeline for the implementation of prospective changes. Analytically speaking, the potential for change in selection procedures may add temporal caveats to the chapter's findings.

The chapter finds empirical support for the study's theory. As predicted, it is clear that HRW officials face a selection dilemma due to the expansion of human rights coverage in recent decades. HRW also lack an institutional framework or standardized system of procedures for issue comparison, and

organizational learning is often ad-hoc or haphazard. Consistent with the theory, key decision-makers appear to play a significant role in setting priorities, particularly at the level of the thematic and regional program divisions. There is also evidence that officials employ heuristics to help resolve the selection dilemma, though they do not appear to be the only factors at play. The availability of reliable information, existing group competencies, as well as the prospect of achieving impact, also seem to be important considerations. Factors associated with competing accounts, such as the preferences of donors, the public, or the media, are found to be of less significance.

The chapter is structured in the following manner. The first section provides background detail on HRW, tracing its origin and development through critical junctures in its operational environment. Second, the chapter explicates the group's current structure and selection procedures. It also reflects on the political context of agenda-setting in the Trump era. The third part examines the relative causal role of general determinants of issue selection. The section also explores the (non-)selection of two issues in HRW's children's rights division, attacks on education and child sex trafficking. The chapter concludes with a brief summation of findings.

4.2 Origin and Evolution

In 1978 the National Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Aryeh Neier, received a telephone call from Robert L. Bernstein. At the time Bernstein was a major figure in publishing, holding the position of President and CEO of Random House. Five years previously, having participated in an Association of American Publishers' delegation to Moscow, he founded the Fund for Free Expression, an organization dedicated to helping writers prohibited from publishing in their own countries. Building on the Fund's work, Bernstein sought to "protest repression against dissenters in the Soviet Union" and, in his call to Neier, proposed the establishment of a US Helsinki Watch Committee (Neier 2003, p. 149). Together with lawyer Orville Schell Jr., and working in

conjunction with George Bundy of the Ford Foundation and Arthur Goldberg, a lawyer and former UN Ambassador, Helsinki Watch – the progenitor body to HRW – was founded.

HRW's early development took place within an expanding network of human rights monitoring and advocacy, a process driven by the signing of the Helsinki Final Act on August 1st 1975. The Helsinki Final Act was the product of Cold War détente and three years of negotiations at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The agreement aimed to reduce US-Soviet diplomatic tensions, set out principles to govern interstate relations and, crucially, contained several provisions guaranteeing the human rights of citizens in the 35 signatory nations (Thomas 2001). US Helsinki Watch formed the largest Western contingent of a transnational coalition monitoring signatories' compliance with their human rights commitments under the Accords. Although not the first monitoring group set up for this purpose, its role in the Helsinki network proved significant given the repression of coalition members in the Eastern bloc.[133] Organizers of the Moscow Helsinki Group, for instance, including chairman and dissident scientist Yuri Orlov, were imprisoned by Soviet authorities soon after its founding in 1976 (Neier 2003, p. 149).

The formalization and diffusion of monitoring activities through the Helsinki process were integral to the growth and efficacy of Helsinki Watch, as well as the subsequent expansion and consolidation of Watch Committees into a transnational force under the umbrella of HRW (Snyder 2011). The global political context of the 1970s and early 1980s was concentrating the minds of human rights defenders in the US – the origins of HRW, its mission, and organizational culture cannot be understood apart from the events of this period. As Neier (2003, p. 151) recalls in his memoir, the connivance of Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and the CIA in Augusto Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973 was "crucial in the emergence of the human rights movement in the United States." Momentum gathered pace under the administration of Ronald Reagan, whose attitude toward human rights – notably in

[133] Groups monitoring Helsinki compliance existed in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, and other European states (Snyder 2011, p. 66-67).

Latin America – was met with great disquiet by activists. In retrospect, it now seems natural that the first expansion of Helsinki Watch saw the creation of an Americas Watch Committee in 1981. This was the region members gauged as most negatively affected by Reagan's foreign policy.[134] Moreover, as an INGO based in the US and staffed by Americans, the human rights policies of the US government was of special interest.

The move also made strategic sense. By forming Americas Watch both groups could reinforce each other's human rights bona fides. As co-founder and Executive Director Jeri Laber[135] (2005, p 100) notes, she and her colleagues faced criticism from both left and right for – depending on the ideological persuasion of the critic – alleged biases against Eastern Bloc countries and the US government. The work of Americas Watch signalled a commitment to human rights beyond the Cold War paradigm, while its association with Helsinki Watch rendered accusations of communist sympathy abortive. The formation of Americas Watch represented an early effort at issue prioritization, as Bernstein et al. balanced a limited pool of resources with ambitions to expand their reach beyond North America and Europe. Although it is difficult to separate the story of HRW's emergence from the political environment of the 1970s and 1980s, and broader trends of INGO proliferation therein, the impact of this small collection of (American, well-connected, and in many instances, legally proficient) individuals in shaping HRW's early history should not be underestimated.

Geographic expansion of the movement continued in the following decade, with Watch Committees forming in Asia (1985), Africa (1988), and the Middle East (1989). By 1988, the existing Committees coalesced under the name Human Rights Watch. Evidence from this period indicate a movement in flux. Organizational structures had yet to solidify, leaving a small staff to come to terms with the

[134] From its formation Americas Watch worked to oppose Reagan's policies in a number of Latin American countries, such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Argentina.
[135] Jeri Laber worked as Executive Director of Helsinki Watch and HRW from 1978-1998, and continued to act as senior advisor to HRW until 2000 (see: Laber 2005).

complex and distinct human rights issues that fall within the remit of a global movement. HRW lacked a clear hierarchy, work was carried out "without any kind of roadmap", and its internal mechanics were largely improvised (Bernstein 2016, p. 175). The makeshift proposals and day-to-day solutions devised by figures like Bernstein and Laber gradually formed the basis of a practical modus operandi.

All of this meant that key personalities were afforded considerable leeway in the issue areas HRW elected to tackle, at times relying on ad-hoc provision of resources and outside expertise to conduct research. For instance, in January 1982 Americas Watch released an extensive report on the human rights situation in El Salvador. The US government was providing backing for the Salvadoran military, which in preceding months had been responsible for the killing of hundreds of civilians. For HRW, the scale and nature of the violence "made El Salvador our first priority" (Neier 2003, p. 191). A coterie of outside experts, appalled by the policy of the Reagan administration, also came on board. Help from the external experts allowed HRW to document abuses for a book-length evaluation of conditions in El Salvador, and to publish it before US assistance to the military was due for renewal (Neier 2003, p. 149).

Lacking a systematic method of assessing issue areas and cases, cogency between the regional constituent bodies proved difficult in the 1980s and early 1990s. In El Salvador the moral and emotional revulsion of HRW staff and experts were in alignment, not least because of a perceived US hand in the military atrocities. But this approach was hardly methodical nor transferable as a general organizational strategy for issue selection. Beyond the template of the Helsinki Accords, HRW had to reconcile desires for a unified organizational purpose with the diverse and localized human rights issues faced across the regions. To help bridge this gap, decision-makers appear to have focused the bulk of their attention on issues pertaining to political violence and abuses of physical integrity, as well modifying aspects of their agenda to fit with local conditions.

Reports from the period illustrate the manifold issues covered by the Watch Committees. The titles of these reports also suggest a combative style of advocacy, indicative of an INGO attempting to exert maximum pressure on perpetrators, establish its own identity in an increasingly competitive organizational environment, and to appeal to potential supporters. "Messengers of Death" (all letters are capitalized in the original report)[136] was the title of an Americas Watch report on Guataemala in 1988-1990. The report covers issues such as political killings, abductions, and torture, as well as the intimidation of trade unionists at various workplaces (a major issue in Guatemala), including at a Coca Cola bottling plant (Americas Watch 1990). Later that year, Asia Watch carried out a fact-finding mission to the Kashmir Valley and New Dehli, producing a comprehensive study into human rights conditions in India. Again the focus was on gross violations of physical integrity rights, including massacres and killings in Handwara, Phaipora, Pattan and Noorbagh. Asia Watch also criticised India's record on press freedoms, freedom of expression, and the rule of law (Asia Watch 1991). Other reports by Middle East Watch (1990) and Asia Watch (1990) document the plight of minority groups in Iraq and issues surrounding land reform in Indonesia and East Timor respectively. In their totality, reports in this period suggest a common focus of on physical integrity rights across HRW, with each regional body targeting issues of specific relevance to individual countries.

How did HRW select its localized causes, and what explains interregional and between-country variation in these choices? One major factor appears to have been, in the absence of a centralized system of planning or the presence of sufficient HRW staff on the ground, the views of stakeholders on the ground. HRW staff collaborated closely with lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists and human rights activists, and their perspectives helped to inform HRW's agenda and shape its reporting. Moreover, network effects emanating from the wider transnational human rights movement appear to have influenced prioritization. HRW often worked closely with other INGOs, sharing

[136] The title refers to a statement made by General Juan José Marroqín Siliézar on December 6th 1989 to new members of Guatemala's Elite Counterinsurgency Unit.

information, expertise and resources. For instance, in 1987 HRW staff helped to write a report on repression in Poland published by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, contributing both to the fact-finding mission and the preparation of the report (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 1987, p. i). Similarly, Middle East Watch collaborated with Physicians for Human Rights in their reporting of the Anfal Campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Americas Watch division worked jointly with the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees on numerous rights issues and co-authored a report on Haiti. Discussions between HRW and other INGOs, many of which were longer established and had superior expertise in several issue areas, helped to HRW's priorities (HRW and PHR 1993; HRW and NCHR 1993).

To carry out its work HRW often relied on expertise and resources that it did not possess in-house. While acknowledging limitations in HRW's organizational capacity, it would be a mistake to assign too much of the explanation to outside actors. Reports from the period suggest that decision-makers managed to retain a considerable degree of thematic consistency across the Watch Committees. Further, contrary to what one might expect —particularly from a constructivist viewpoint — international norms and the legal codification of rights did not weigh heavily on its priorities. In fact, HRW executives attracted criticism from fellow human rights advocates for pushing the envelope on issues not yet covered by legal agreements, or those that had not yet realized a broad normative consensus. HRW pioneered several issues in the human rights movement, such as the protection of civil liberties of those convicted of non-political crimes, as well as monitoring combatants compliance with the laws of war (Neier 2003, p. xxvi). In comparison to its closest 'rival', Amnesty International, HRW remained a small and elite-led organization. One implication of this structure was that individuals at the executive level had considerable flexibility in reacting to global events, formulating policy, and choosing issues to tackle. Throughout the 1980s the group's leaders — figures such as Bernstein, Neier and Laber retained senior executive positions— continued to exert considerable influence over its planning and direction, both centrally and within the regional committees.

The Cold War Ends

One of the recurring themes raised by HRW staff, both in interviews and informal conversations, is that the organization is in "constant motion". Despite relative consistency in the leadership of the INGO – as we have seen, figures such as Bernstein, Neier, and Laber were mainstays of the HRW hierarchy, while Kenneth Roth has held the position of Executive Director from 1993 until the present – its internal methods and organizational priorities have been liable to shift over time.[137] Perhaps never was this more true than in the 1990s. For HRW, the collapse of the Communist Bloc marked a major change in the human rights landscape. The political backdrop of a bi-polar world, one which the organization had been careful to negotiate, no longer existed. Countries previously inaccessible to its researchers were now open. These external shifts prompted a re-evaluation of HRW's approach to issue prioritization, as is made plain by the documentary record.

Helsinki Watch's annual report in 1990 notes that "the East European revolutions of 1989 have had a profound effect on the work of Helsinki Watch…the transformations in many of the countries in which we have long been involved have also compelled us to reassess our program for the future and to reorder our priorities" (HRW 1990a). At this juncture, amid significant between-country and regional variation in the specifics of issues highlighted by HRW, five common areas of focus can be identified. These are the protection of human rights monitors, violations of the laws of war, human rights abuses in ethnic conflicts, accountability for past abuses (e.g. officials associated with the dictatorships in Chile and Argentina), and US foreign policy (HRW 1990b). These issues were quite typical of the broader human rights network, which concentrated the majority of its energy on civil and political rights and violations of individuals' physical integrity. Moreover, HRW was transparent in its concentration on US policy. The latter focus not only reflected the cultural and demographic origins on HRW, as well as a means of rebutting accusations of Western bias, but signalled a

[137] From a research perspective, one consequence of this is quite low institutional memory in staff which have joined HRW in more recent years. In many ways, the INGO they have joined differs greatly from the one operating in the late 70s and 1980s. To grasp this early period, the primary repositories of information are the memoirs and personal accounts of a small cadre of leading individuals, as well as archival material made available to researchers.

commitment to scale. Decision-makers recognised the US as "an important actor in world affairs…[that] has the capacity to have a significant impact on the human rights situation in many countries" (HRW 1990b).

Over the course of the next 15 years, HRW faced increasing pressure from activists and human rights bodies to expand its agenda to include economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights. ESC rights were a site of discussion in human rights circles for many years. It is hard to imagine the new-found momentum for ESC rights without the collapse of the USSR. During the Cold War, distinct spheres of human rights law had become politicized; the US and its Western allies emphasized the importance of civil and political rights, while the Soviets criticised the West for not taking economic rights seriously. With the disintegration of the Communist bloc, and accusations of Soviet dupery levelled against INGOs no longer credible, momentum for ESC rights grew exponentially. It is somewhat puzzling why, concerned as its leaders were with appearing impartial and above politics, HRW had yet to integrate ESC issues into its agenda. ESC rights had been enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)[138] in 1966. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a normative and legal consensus in the international human rights movement that ESC rights required urgent attention. And yet, even after the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Program of Action reiterated the indivisibility of human rights – further elevating the status of ESC rights – HRW was reluctant to adjust their issue agenda to reflect these developments.

HRW's stance may be accounted for, in part, by the individual preferences of its leaders. For instance, Aryeh Neier, one of the most prominent legal voices in HRW and the US more broadly, objected to inserting the language of rights into economic matters. He argued that pursuing the ESC agenda could "diminish the protection of political rights", was incompatible with the need to "insist

[138] https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx

on adherence to the same criteria everywhere", and impinged on the democratic process – Neier viewed the distribution of resources as a matter of democratic deliberation, not as a predetermined outgrowth of universal rights (Neier 2003, p. xxx). Senior figures in HRW also held strategic reservations about advocacy work on ESC rights. In February 2004, Kenneth Roth published an article in *Human Rights Quarterly* outlining practical constraints that prevented HRW from incorporating ESC issues into their work. Roth posited that ESC rights fitted poorly with the "shaming methodology" that undergirded HRW's work. He argued that this method was "most effective when there is relative clarity about violation, violator, and remedy. That clarity is best achieved when misconduct can be portrayed as arbitrary or discriminatory "…rather than a matter of purely distributive justice" (Roth 2004, p. 63). More straightforwardly, although HRW were well aware of the legal basis and normative arguments that warranted advocacy on ESC issues, violations of civil and political rights appeared to be an easier and more saleable avenue to pursue. The chain of responsibility could be more readily established in the latter case, encompassing less ambiguity for key audiences, including the public at large. Clarity of responsibility was viewed as key to the effective shaming of perpetrators and to securing changes in the behaviour of repressive governments.

Intelligible as Neier and Roth's stated positions were, the organization displayed an attachment to certain core issues and a particular method of working that was considered outdated by contemporaries. Neier's stance was regarded as conservative by colleagues in the human rights movement. In the same year that Roth's article appeared in *Human Rights Quarterly* Leonard S. Rubenstein, the Executive Director of Physicians for Human Rights, wrote a direct response in the same journal. In his piece, Rubenstein (2004) persuasively notes myriad means by which INGOs such as HRW could use existing competencies, as well as an evolution of current methods, to advance the struggle for ESC rights.[139] Given the options available for HRW to develop its issue priorities, its inflexible approach to evolving its methods can plausibly be explained by the

[139] Rubenstein identifies several activities, such as lobbying and monitoring state compliance, by which HRW could meaningfully contribute to the advancement of ESC rights.

preferences of key decision-makers. In fact, Neier's views suggest a socio-psychological dimension to the debate. For many human rights practitioners – especially those with a background in law – as well as the general population, breaches of civil and political rights were simply a more obvious and arresting form of abuse. Violations of ESC rights, on the other hand, were seen as within the realm of conventional politics. In comparison to torture and extrajudicial killings, issues relating to poverty, health, housing, education, and cultural traditions, were simply too convoluted and structural in character to elicit a comparable sense of urgency.

Despite decision-makers' scepticism, it is now clear that the priorities of HRW were transitioning to a broader agenda in this period, one that would be more inclusive of ESC rights. The seeds of this transition are evident in Roth's (2004, p. 71) article, which argues that "an important part of our work should be to shape public opinion gradually so that it tends to see ESC issues not only in terms of distributive justice but also in terms of discriminatory or arbitrary conduct." Roth had effectively conceded the point on ESC rights, and it was probable they would form part of HRW's agenda in the near future. The intervening years have borne this out; ESC rights have become a central feature of HRW's work: "we have increasingly taken on social, cultural, and economic rights in our research and reporting…[and] have given particular attention to health, education, and housing" (HRW 2019). In fact, HRW's work in this area has become prolific. The group's annual reports now contain extensive references to the state of ESC issues across the world.[140] HRW also regularly formulate comprehensive and country-specific submissions to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.[141]

Moreover, as part of its widening agenda in the mid-to-late 1990s, LGBT rights became another prominent area of uptake for HRW. Transnational advocacy on abuses suffered by members of the

[140] https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019
[141] For an example, see: https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/15/submission-human-rights-watch-committee-economic-social-and-cultural-rights-senegal

LGBT community had, prior to the mid-1990s, been confined to more marginal, issue-specific INGOs. In line with Bob (2008), these organizations endeavoured to put LGBT rights on the agenda of gatekeeper organizations such as HRW, and were crucial to the incorporation of LGBT rights within a human rights framework. However, among larger human rights INGOs, HRW's influence as norm entrepreneurs on LGBT rights was significant – its Women's Rights Project taking initiative on the topic. HRW played an instrumental role in bringing LGBT rights into the mainstream of the human rights movement, and the group began producing country reports that evaluated local conditions on LGBT issues (see: Mertus 2007). What seems integral this shift was HRW staff drawing points of connection between LGBT issues and its existing program, notably its work on women's rights. Over the past 25 years LGBT rights have been a prominent feature of HRW's agenda – a specialized division has been set up to focus on LGBT issues[142] – and feature prominently in its research and campaigning.

These developments raise important considerations for the scope conditions of the study's theory. It is unlikely that rapid changes in the perceived mission of HRW can purely be explained in terms of heuristic-led judgments on the part of leading officials. Rather, these abrupt changes were coterminous with, and likely causally related to, significant events in the INGO's operational environment. The sudden opening of political systems and geographical spaces at the end of Cold War – perhaps best classified as an external shock – appears to have prompted a re-evaluation of issue selection, both within HRW and the human rights sector more broadly. It seems axiomatic that such a major structural change to the international political system helped to shape the proliferation of issue coverage in ensuing years, and this shift is therefore outside the scope of the present theory.

[142] https://www.hrw.org/topic/lgbt-rights

HRW Redux: Issue Selection After 9/11

As with most large INGOs, the attacks on September 11th 2001 had a major influence on the course of the organization. The onset of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the global proliferation of laws curtailing domestic freedoms, and the detention of hundreds at Guantanamo Bay, breathed new life into HRW's traditional focus on civil and political rights. Immediately prior to 9/11, there was an internal perception held by leaders that substantial progress had been made on civil and political rights. This progress allowed for greater attention to be paid to less established issues – such as ESC and LGBT rights – and for HRW's mission to be widened. Political scientist Alison Watson summarizes events and thinking at the time:

> "prior to the events of that day, the improvements that had taken place in global civil and political rights appeared to be sufficiently secure for…[HRW and Amnesty International] to have begun to shift their focus somewhat towards a greater concern with issues such as access to education and health care. For HRW, this shift in focus reflected a particular concern regarding the violation of economic, social and cultural rights…the 'war on terrorism' ensued and for HRW…it brought to the fore the need not simply to win back the rights of those long held dormant first by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and then by the 'rogue regime' in Iraq, but also to ensure, more than ever, that those rights were not won back by means that themselves constituted human rights abuses" (Watson 2004, p. 441).

In the post-9/11 years, issue selection was a more salient decision-making problem for HRW. Inroads that had been made into the safeguarding of civil and political rights, changes HRW members had helped to bring about, now appeared to be eroding. Coupled with this, the group had by now developed competencies in research and advocacy in an array of areas under the rubric of ESC rights. The menu of issue options HRW could choose to work on was more substantively diverse and convoluted than ever before, making issue selection a more difficult proposition. As a

result of the external shock of 9/11, and the policy manoeuvres which followed, there was a feeling of retrenchment among HRW decision-makers, as the groups centre of focus shifted once again to civil and political rights. Earlier reports examining violence and abuses rights in Afghanistan,[143] for example, were revisited and built upon, including work on the outward flow of refugees displaced by the Afghan war.[144] The group enacted a new global campaign entitled "Opportunism in the Face of Tragedy: Repression in the Name of Anti-Terrorism",[145] designed to shame governments who cited security concerns as a justification for violating citizens' domestic civil and political rights. In the ensuing years the group was "…particularly vocal in its criticism of the Bush administration and the behaviour of some of its allies in the 'war on terror', claiming that some policy makers have taken advantage of the situation in order to undertake policies that are seen by HRW as either unreasonably restrictive or punitive in their nature…" (Watson 2004, p. 449).

Censuring the US government and its allies brought forth inevitable criticism, attracting the ire of the Bush administration and public supporters of the "War on Terror". Perhaps more surprisingly, internal critics also emerged. HRW's approach to Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict was one repeated source of contention. In 2009 Robert Bernstein, now chairman emeritus of HRW, wrote an op-ed in *The New York Times* chastising the INGO he helped found for casting "aside its important distinction between open and closed societies" (Bernstein 2009). In his article, Bernstein posited that it was part of the group's ethos "…to draw a sharp line between the democratic and nondemocratic worlds, in an effort to create clarity in human rights", a stance he thought HRW had now abandoned, as evidenced by a disproportionate focus on the state of Israel (Bernstein 2009). Conversely, HRW faced criticism from left-wing voices for aligning itself too closely to the rhetoric and

[143] In 1998, for example, HRW had published a report on violence in the country entitled: "Afghanistan: The Massacre in Mazar-i Sharif." The report is available here: http://www.hrw.org/reports98/afghan/. For a 2001 report on violations of women's rights in Afghanistan see: "Humanity Denied: Systematic Violations of Women's Rights in Afghanistan." Available at: http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/afghan3/

[144] Closed Door Policy: Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and Iran (2002).
Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2002/02/27/closed-door-policy/afghan-refugees-pakistan-and-iran

[145] See: https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/september11/opportunismwatch.htm

pronouncements of the US government, as well as ignoring the socio-economic achievements of countries that did not ally themselves with the US (Bhatt 2013).

Staff familiar with the period recount a sense of irony and pessimism. The group had taken part in extensive discussions, both internally and with international stakeholders, on the future direction of the human rights movement. HRW's leaders felt that events surrounding 9/11 had forced their hand, and they had little choice but to formulate a robust response to backsliding in civil and political rights. However, while the ensuing years brought an abeyance in the level of attention paid to ESC rights, this proved short-lived. Having accepted the legitimacy and necessity of broadening its agenda and tackling ESC rights, HRW had undergone a fundamental shift in the perception of its own mission. Issues such as education, housing, access to health facilities, reproductive rights, and labour protections, previously regarded as well outside the scope of the organization (and rights-based advocacy more generally), were increasingly seen as integral to its remit. These issues, among others, became part and parcel of its everyday work, wringing significant changes to HRW's internal structure and complicating questions of prioritization.

4.3 HRW Today

The HRW of today – the primary focus of the project's analysis – is markedly different from the group which operated in the 1980s and 1990s. The intervening period has been one of growth and change, both in terms of the anatomy of the group and its perception of itself as an increasingly global actor. An experienced member of the HRW executive, who has worked for the group for over twenty years, described the group's trajectory:

> "The organization has grown an extraordinary amount in the last twenty years, especially in the last ten years. It has internationalized…[and] in some ways begun an irreversible change in its character as it has internationalized. Aspects of the changes that are underway

> organizationally right now have to do with next steps…with the evolution of the organization from a collection of independent regional organizations to a more coherent global organization" (Interview ID: D).[146]

As the above statement alludes to, HRW continues to undergo a process of evolution. Prior to, and throughout, field research for the present study, the INGO has been engaged in a comprehensive internal review. Across a roughly nine-month period, staff at all levels and within various governing bodies have participated in discussions surrounding potential areas of reform. An associate director who is helping to manage the process identified a number of goals, several of which directly pertain to issue selection. These include the formation of a new strategic plan, a potential shift in priority towards developing/emerging human rights challenges, and the creation of a more "precise and effective decision-making process…with less personality-led decisions" (Interview ID: H).[147] What emerges from these discussions remains uncertain, but the review could well lead to changes in how HRW identifies priorities and the process by which it determines what to work on.

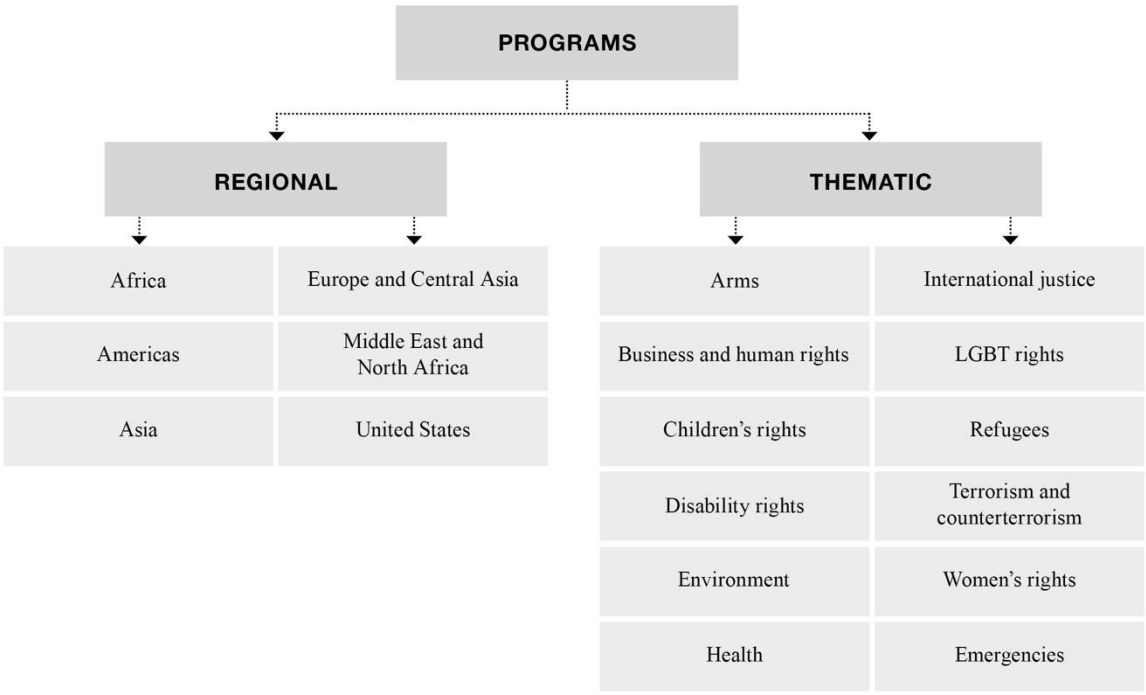
Given the temporally contingent nature of its decisional set-up, identifying HRW's current organizational characteristics is important to making causal claims regarding how the group sets its agenda. Although many of the organization's core features, as well as the motivational logics which underpin issue selection, may remain in place, the nature of HRW as a "moving target" for study – an analytical challenge likely to arise an any timepoint in its history – presents a caveat for future readings of this research. What follows should therefore be considered a snapshot (albeit a substantive one) of a dynamic organization at a particular stage of development, one whose internal mode of working is subject to revision in coming years.

[146] Member of HRW executive.
[147] Associate Director at HRW.

At present, HRW is comprised of about 400 staff – lawyers, journalists, country experts, among other human rights professionals – who monitor and engage in human rights advocacy in over 80 countries. Headquartered in New York, it has offices and subsidiary entities distributed globally, including the UK, Russia, Japan, Australia, Brazil, South Africa and Lebanon. Financial statements reveal assets well in excess of $200 million[148] - although a significant sum, it was evident from interviews with staff, as we shall come to below, that HRW is less financially independent relative to a group like AI, with is sizable base of individual supporters. In terms of decisional structure, the group is led by an executive and is split into seven divisions, including teams devoted to law and policy, media, financing, and advocacy. Its program work, which covers research and advocacy on substantive areas of human rights protection, is organized into two pillars. First, programs are separated geographically into five regions and, signalling its importance, an additional division devoted specifically to the United States. Second, they are divided thematically into eleven distinct programs, the range of which exemplify the broad spectrum of HRW's work (see Figure 5).

[148] This information is taken from a consolidated financial report of HRW and its subsidiaries, published on June 30th, 2018. See: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/financial_statement_fy18.pdf

Figure 5. HRW Programs Division



Source: HRW Annual World Report 2018.

Examining Figure 1, two aspects of HRW's internal structure are of particular note for issue selection. Perhaps most striking is the diversity of issue areas which are not only covered by HRW, but have now solidified into specialized program divisions. The spectrum of issues embedded in the anatomy of the organization contrasts starkly to its original, strict focus on state breaches of civil and political rights. In the early years of the group's existence, distinct sections dedicated to the relationship between human rights and healthcare, corporate governance, and the environment would have seemed improbable. The recent expansion of HRW's remit has added layers of complexity to how the organization pursues its mission and prioritizes its resources. As the number of issue areas have increased, so too has the substantive differences between them. Previously, decision-makers could compare the record of different countries on a delimited set of civil and

political rights and prioritize its work by making inferences about the relative severity of abuses. A broader and multi-faceted picture of human rights conditions across countries makes judgments of severity much more difficult. Ethical questions regarding where attention should be focused are now far from axiomatic, as metrics of comparison between issue areas are difficult if not impossible to formulate.

Related to this, one of the most surprising and consequential research discoveries in relation to HRW's organizational structure is the absence of a division dedicated to the monitoring and evaluation of its program activities. Over the past thirty years, there has been a significant uptake in monitoring and evaluation in the non-governmental and humanitarian sector. This has resulted from increased demands on the part of stakeholders for higher levels of accountability and evidence-based evaluations of performance. Mechanisms of evaluation are also viewed as crucial to organizational learning and efficient project management. Internal systems of this kind also help NGOs to establish protocols and metrics for selecting future project work (Crawford and Bryce 2003). Lacking such a division, decision-makers in HRW must arrive at policy outcomes without systematic knowledge of the quality and impact of previous work and, by extension, robust evidence as to the likely effects of subsequent choices. While this has been the case since HRW was formed, its implications are compounded by the growing diversity and complexity of HRW's mission, as well as by the significant financial and human resources in question. Whatever the underlying motivations of decision-makers in choosing issues – rational, normative, or some combination of the two – the probability of patterns of issue prioritization reliably reflecting these logics appears low given considerable informational constraints. The process of preference formation among key actors in HRW must therefore attempt to bridge gaps between the group's ambition and means of achieving desired outcomes.

Extraneous to formal structure, recent shifts in the global political environment provide unique context for understanding issue selection in HRW. A head of division in the New York office

explained that the rise of populist leaders in countries such as Brazil, Hungary, and the Philippines have re-oriented the priorities of the group, re-focusing attention on the consequences of human rights backsliding under authoritarian governments. In the United States, the election of President Donald Trump caused a major disruption to day-to-day operations, posing new challenges that had not arisen under previous administrations. One of the main problems raised by Trump's election is the issue of access to policymakers. Over a period of many years, staff had cultivated fruitful relationships with government officials and members of Congress. These Washington DC connections were critical to the group's strategy of policy change and to the success of its lobbying efforts. When Trump administration assumed office HRW officials found themselves shut out from its normal channels of work, requiring a significant pivot in operational strategy. To some extent, HRW had also viewed the US government as a partner (albeit an imperfect one) at the international level. Staff aimed to lean on US diplomats to push their human rights agenda, and to leverage the political, economic, and cultural weight of the US during negotiations at international bodies. Again, this relationship effectively ended when Trump took office. HRW no longer saw the US government as a willing or reliable partner on human rights. Much of the group's diplomatic strategy had to be re-evaluated, with its US division experiencing particularly high levels of disruption (Interview ID: G).[149] It is against this backdrop, and shift in operational context, that HRW's approach to issue selection should be understood.

4.4 The Determinants of Issue Selection in HRW

To explain patterns of issue selection in HRW, it is first necessary to elucidate the decision-making process that underpins the generation of issue rankings, as well as identifying the key actors that shape outcomes. Interviews with staff across organizational levels are particularly insightful in this regard, as inconsistencies may arise between the formal structure outlined in official documents and

[149] Head of Program Division in New York Office of HRW.

the practical, day-to-day exercise of internal coordination and resource allocation. As Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 355) note, "technical activities and demands for efficiency create conflicts and inconsistencies in an institutionalized organization's efforts to conform to the ceremonial rules...". In the case of HRW, conversations with officials – several of whom with a decades-long affiliation to the group – reveal the importance of distinguishing between formal arrangements and how issue selection works in reality. One longstanding member of HRW's executive body, and former director of program, pointed to a decoupling of organizational practices and official structure, "official structure hasn't changed much, but the reality of decision-making has changed enormously" (Interview ID: E). [150]

One of the principal features of HRW, in contrast to major human rights groups such as Amnesty International, is that it does not function nor regard itself as a democratic body. While Amnesty's priorities are to some degree beholden to the wishes of its membership base, the internal mechanics of HRW more closely resemble a conventional, private organization with established hierarchies. The perspectives of staff suggest this approach to decision-making is by design, and one they are fully conscious of. An executive member described it as follows:

> "I would not use the word democratic [to describe HRW], we are not a membership-based organization. Amnesty, or Greenpeace, they are organizations where the direction is charted by the membership…Human Rights Watch has never aspired to be democratic. I wouldn't use that word. I would say 'decentralized', I would that that's definitely accurate." (Interview ID: D).

One of the advantages of HRW's structure is that the process of issue selection is less cumbersome than membership-based entities, making for a more agile and responsive organization. A further

[150] Member of HRW Executive and former director of program.

corollary is that, because the group is less concerned with implementing a democratic style of governance, considerable discretion is vested in key individuals across different areas of the organization. Illustrating this, the directors of the regional offices exert significant power over selection. On paper, program work appears equally divided between themes and regions. However, interviews with members of management showed a consensus that, in practice, regional offices are often to the forefront in agenda-setting and that 'regional directors have a lot of say' (Interview ID E). Illustrating the point, one official with senior management experience in the program side of the organization described the relationship of Brazil office to the thematic sections and central organization:

> "From a hierarchical perspective, yes, New York determined what went on in Brazil. And if you look at the organigram you'd say it [the Brazil office] is not independent, that it still dances to the tune of New York. But the reality of it was, 95% of what the Brazil office worked on, how it worked, what it said, how it said it, was decided by Sao Paolo…Obviously the Sao Paolo office is part of a broader organization, so everything they wrote had to be viewed by other people and had to be approved…Any institution has certain standard setting…so they had to work within that. And if they were working on environmental issues, disabilities rights issues, or women's rights issues, they also had to negotiate approaches, and language, and advocacy strategies with the thematic specialists within the organizations" (Interview ID: E).

The importance of individuals for issue selection extends throughout HRW more broadly. One head of division put it quite starkly that, in general – allowing for the influence of internal advocates and the differing contexts of particular choices – when it comes to issue uptake within their divisional remit, "I make the decisions" (Interview ID: G). Another senior official involved in staff training conceded that, to date, individual personalities have wielded significant sway over the direction of the organization. The official also expressed hope that the on-going internal review would alter this

dynamic. Creating a more precise and streamlined method of selection, where priorities fit within an overall strategic plan, is a core ambition of the review (Interview ID: H). Currently, rather than being the product of systematic procedures or metrics, the decision to enact projects and target new issue areas occurs more organically. The development of HRW's position on poverty, inequality, and human rights is one example. An official involved in its formulation noted that, as with many issue areas, the initial impetus for HRW's policy on poverty and inequality came from a couple of individuals using their own initiative to collaborate and develop possible pathways for future work (Interview ID: E).

Although directors may serve as gatekeepers who rubberstamp divisional priorities, the early stages of issue selection appear to be a particularly organic and iterative process. A deputy director on the program side of the INGO explained that at the micro-level, conversations tend to begin with the researchers. For instance, the Children's Rights division holds an annual planning process to set priorities for the following year. In recognition of their expertise, this aspect of the planning process is led by the researchers themselves. Similarly, in the Women's Rights division researchers will help formulate a strategy memorandum with a description of potential avenues for future work. The memo is then collectively evaluated within the division and proposals are made to work on a set of issues or not. Once agreed, the executive management team may sign-off or veto any proposals. At this stage, informal lobbying may take place between divisional leaders and the executive, and vetoes are usually unlikely. While it cannot be characterised as democratic, it is largely a "bottom-up" process. There is also broad consensus across all levels of HRW about the importance of "deference to expertise", ensuring insights provided by researchers, as well as the localized knowledge of regional divisions, are weighed heavily in choosing what issues should take precedence over others (Interview ID: F).[151]

[151] Deputy Director of Program and Women's Rights Expert.

The process of decision-making within HRW has important implications for evaluating the study's theory. If the psychological traits of key decision-makers do in fact impact outcomes at the organizational level, the process should exhibit two main features. First, it should be clear that individual personalities have – and exercise – the capacity to shift the group's priorities. If the role of individuals in the policy process was marginal, it would be improbable that psychological variables associated with these individuals are of significant causal import. Second, we should observe that HRW lacks systematic methods and metrics – based on a self-interested or normative motivational logic – to adjudicate between issues. If such metrics were institutionalized in the organization, this would reduce the need for actors to rely on heuristics and thus reduce their explanatory scope. As the above qualitative data suggests, the decision-making process in HRW appears consistent with the observable implications of the theory. At this juncture, the study's theory remains plausible.

Explanatory Factors

Now that we have an idea of how decision-making functions, we can turn to causal factors that may motivate selection among different issue areas. In light of the empirical data, it is useful to draw a distinction between factors that are necessary for selection, and those that could potentially contribute to it. Taking the former first, there was unanimity among those staff who were interviewed, both across levels and divisions, with regard to the importance of information for choosing issues that fit with the HRW's approach to human rights protection. The group's advocacy model can be summarized under three headings: "Investigate, Expose, and Change". The collections of behaviours associated with each rubric is summarized below (see: Figure 6). Examining the three stages in the model, it is apparent that many of HRW's activities – conducting ground research, interviewing victims, and data analysis – involve the production of reliable information, while others – publishing reports, shaping media coverage, and influencing policy – are dependent on it. In one form or another, several staff members agreed with the sentiments of a senior figure on the

executive, who stated that "without sufficient information we can't do our job" (Interview ID: C).[152] Moreover, because HRW trades on its reputation as a credible moral agent, engaging on an issue without sufficient and well-sourced data could prove very damaging to the long term viability of the organization.

Figure 6. HRW Advocacy Model



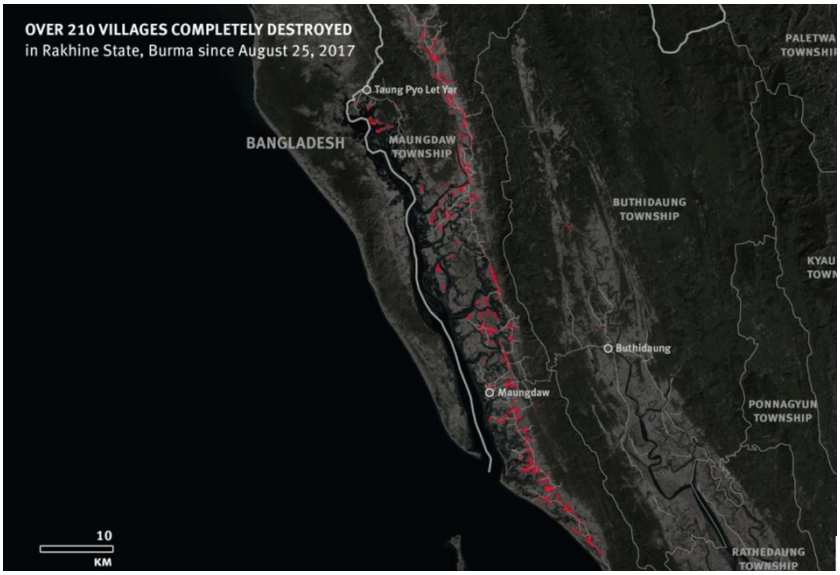
Source: HRW (2015). Human Rights Watch: Rising to the Challenge

It is clear the ability to gather high-quality information is an essential aspect of issue selection. However, the extent to which this factor leads decision-makers to discriminate between issues seems more questionable. There are cases – the human rights record of North Korea, for instance – where HRW are severely hampered in their attempts to gain access to ground conditions and gather definitive information. Yet, despite gaps in their knowledge about the precise nature of abuses in North Korea, they have made wide-ranging criticisms of the regime.[153] In addition, the number of

[152] Senior figure on HRW executive.
[153] https://www.hrw.org/asia/north-korea. One could also argue that the testimonies of North Korean defectors is a sufficient form of evidence on which HRW can base claims. However, the isolation of the DPRK means human rights groups have difficulties in triangulating evidence and corroborating testimony.

issue areas and cases that are beyond the reach of HRW appears relatively small. In recent years human rights INGOs have become more sophisticated in their use of technology. Tools such as drones, satellite imagery, and video forensics are increasingly employed in areas where HRW are prohibited from deploying personnel or it would be too dangerous to do so (HRW 2015). For example, HRW have used analysis of satellite imagery to document the destruction of Rohingya villages in Burma.[154] Emergency situations, such as countries affected by civil war and other forms of violence, are no longer as closed off to INGOs as they once were. Therefore, while the availability of quality information might approximate a necessary factor for issue uptake, the pool of issues that that are completely inaccessible to HRW appears relatively small. Information is a prerequisite for, but does not seem to be a key driver of, issue selection, and with the development of technology its salience is more likely to decrease rather than increase over time.

Figure 7: Satellite Imagery of Destroyed Villages, Rahkine State, Burma**.**



Source: Human Rights Watch (2017).

[154] See: https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/19/burma-satellite-imagery-shows-mass-destruction

Regarding contributory factors, one of the cynical views of INGOs is that issue selection is largely driven by donors.[155] According to this perspective, a dependence of INGOs on donor investment will naturally shift the priorities of groups such as HRW to more closely align with the preferences of their financiers. By doing so, groups will help to secure future financing and ensure they remain viable in a competitive marketplace. Another possibility is that donors will advertise the availability of money to implement a particular project (e.g. helping to register newly arrived refugees in Europe) on their behalf, and INGOs will move to establish themselves in that particular space to avail of the funds. In evaluating the impact of donors on HRW's priorities, it is worth noting at the outset that, compared to this study's other case studies Amnesty International and Oxfam, the topic of donors was much more frequently raised in an unsolicited fashion by staff at HRW. This being said, the picture that emerges of HRW's relationship with donors appears more complex than what one might expect if officials were motivated by the self-interest of the organization.

When HRW evaluates whether to engage in advocacy on a new issue, funding is a key considering in the decision-making process. Rarely are new issues funded from the general budget, meaning that additional work will require supplementary financing. "It is vital to find money for new work" an experienced executive member noted, with the "traditional method" being a fundraising effort specifically geared towards the new prospective issue (Interview ID: E). A HRW official directly involved in its fundraising activities explained that the group categorizes its donations into three different types. Donations may be classified as either general, designated, or restricted support, each of which reflects different levels of conditionality associated with the funding. With general support – the most desirable from a HRW standpoint – the donation is made without being directed to any specific area and the organization is free to allocate it as they see fit. In contrast, designated support usually indicates that the donor has an interest in a certain aspect of HRW's work. During discussions

[155] HRW has attracted past criticism for its dealings with donors, see: https://www.hrw.org/visit-saudi-arabia-and-false-allegations-human-rights-watch-bias

with the donor, a HRW official will propose possible options for spending the money that typically fit with their current projects. If successful, designated support will allow HRW to shift funding due to be spent on that issue area to the central budget. Finally, when donors choose to give restricted support it means their money can only be used for a purpose they have specified (Interview ID: G).[156]

Since 1998, HRW has developed "a global network of volunteers who support the organization through fundraising, outreach, and advocacy initiatives" (HRW 2019). The network has over 1,000 members and a presence in 34 cities. In contrast to the membership and individual-based fundraising of Amnesty, the vast majority of HRW's funding is drawn from a relatively small number of sources. An official familiar with HRW's fundraising efforts estimated that around 80% of donations came from wealthy individuals and large foundations,[157] while HRW does not accept donations directly or indirectly from governments. Societal changes in the distribution of wealth has also changed the nature of who donates to HRW. Young, wealthy entrepreneurs now make up a larger portion of donors than before, a group that tend to place more emphasis on seeing measurable impact for their money (Interview ID: D).

It is difficult to discern the precise impact of donors on issue selection. One problem is that the direction of causation may shift over time. For instance, external actors may be attracted to the existing work of HRW and give a donation on this basis. Once the relationship is established, one might reasonably predict that the prospect of delivering future funding may, at a later timepoint, help the donor to leverage the work of HRW in a direction they wish. During interviewing, HRW staff were quite adamant that donors did not have a substantial impact on their planning; officials would regularly plan research and advocacy work on the assumption that there could be a problem or

[156] Fundraising and engaging with potential donors is a central aspect of the role of this staff member.
[157] Among others, HRW lists the Open Society Institute, the Ford Foundation, the Atlantic Philanthropies, and the MacArthur Foundation as partners. See: https://www.hrw.org/partners

shortfall in the amount agreed with the donor. A senior figure, who liaises extensively with donors and is actively involved in issue selection, put it as follows: "If it's not already on the agenda for us…it [donations] almost never materializes a new issue we will work on. We try and shape it in the right direction" (Interview ID: G).

The evidence suggests that HRW may well work on – or devote additional resources to – new issues if the money is made available by donors for those causes. For example, they may extend their work to a new case, or examine another dimension of an existing human rights problem. It therefore seems clear that donors influence organizational outputs, a link that appears tighter in comparison with its counterpart AI. At the same time, even in the case of restricted support, it is improbable that the issue selected by the donor would have been absent from HRW's radar. Donors may help determine the extent that it is feasible for HRW to work on an issue, as well as the intensity of their activities on it, but they typically do not place new issues on HRW's agenda. In effect, donors will select from a menu of issue options, but that menu is, in the first instance, formally or informally curated by HRW. If HRW has not considered the issue in advance, or it does not fit with its existing work, it appears unlikely that the group will incorporate it. Donors may thus contribute to issue selection, but they do so within confines set by HRW. There is little evidence that donors have exerted a significant shift in the agenda of the organization.

One of the most common theories of agenda-setting in humanitarian actors concerns media attention. According to proponents of this theory, the pervasive coverage of humanitarian crises on television and online can shape organizational incentives and the preferences of decision-makers for action (Robinson 2002). Somewhat surprisingly, the reputed causal direction of the media-INGO relationship is also one which HRW staff were especially sceptical of. As a human rights group, HRW are very much aware of the mobilizing capacity of the media and its importance for achieving behavioural changes in perpetrators. A leading executive member stated that the group faces a conscious decision as to whether they should "make the wave or ride the wave" of media coverage,

with their preference being the former (Interview ID: C). HRW's work on the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar is an illustrative example of this strategy.

The Rohingya people are a minority group in Myanmar that, over the course of decades, have faced severe abuses of human rights, including enforced statelessness and targeted violence. The crisis facing the Rohingya escalated in 2017, with widespread burning of villages, violent killings, and rape. As a result, hundreds of thousands of refugees cross the border into neighbouring Bangladesh.[158] During this period, the volatility of the situation in Rakhine state made fact-finding on the ground difficult for reporters. In the initial stages of ethnic cleansing media attention remained relatively low. HRW made a strategic decision to try to address the lack of media coverage, with staff members calling contacts in the press to stress the seriousness of the situation. HRW officials also met with members of the media, presenting them with evidence – including analysis of satellite images they had gathered – of pervasive attacks on Rohingya villages.

By "putting facts in the journalists hands", rather than being reactive to media coverage, HRW helped to drive it (Interview ID: C). A staff member who works in communications, and was involved in HRW's response to the Rohingya crisis, argued that by taking initiative with the media HRW helped to produce a mutually beneficial arrangement. Through reaching out to the press and offering evidence on an issue that has yet to attract much media attention, HRW had an opportunity to frame subsequent coverage in line with their principles, or at least to nudge coverage in their preferred direction. On the other hand, the media requires facts to do their reporting. Journalists tend to trust that HRW's research and fact-checking is of a high standard. This alleviates the burden of data gathering for journalists, and can allow them to get a story out ahead of competitors (Interview ID: C). Although opportunities to drive media coverage do not always materialize, and there are cases there the media is unreceptive to the stories HRW which to highlight, staff are in routine contact

[158] For more information, see: https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis

with journalists and, at opportune moments – as a matter of policy – will seek to influence media output. In general, there was a marked consensus among decision-makers across divisions that the media has a marginal, if any, impact on activities of HRW.

A closely related potential factor in issue selection is public opinion. While decision-makers were confident media was of little influence on their work, there is evidence that their relationship with public opinion is more ambiguous. This is understandable, given an ostensible tension between HRW's desire to portray itself as a neutral arbiter, and a pragmatic need to mobilize popular opinion to pressurize perpetrators and attract support (Davis et al. 2012). Discussions with staff across the organization revealed somewhat diverging accounts of how public attitudes do affect, or should influence, their agenda. From the perspective of one divisional director, public opinion was a consideration "more so with communication than with selection" (Interview ID: J). Public opinion was something to appeal to and harness in favour of an agenda that was internally generated. Again, deference to research expertise was posited as the prevailing norm. A rise in the salience of underserved issues was not viewed as a response to increased public attention. Conversely, the selection of new, previously neglected issues "comes from great researchers" (Interview ID: C).

The claim that the process of issue selection is largely insulated from the demands of public opinion has considerable empirical support. HRW devotes significant resources to causes that – both currently and at the time of policy inception – the public is almost totally unaware of. A leading executive member, who is familiar with the range of HRW activities, noted that in countries such as Indonesia and Ghana the group has documented and sought policy changes on the practice of shackling. Across both countries thousands of people with mental health conditions have been forcibly detained in camps, and have been shackled in chains to beds, cement blocks, and animal pens. Despite very little public awareness, or influential constituencies lobbying for action to be taken, HRW have spent years covering the issue and calling on the Indonesia and Ghanaian

governments to end shackling.[159] Similarly, HRW have invested substantial time and resources to investigate and report on pesticide poisoning in rural Brazil. The use of pesticides on crops have meant that locals living in rural areas have been exposed to toxic chemicals. Apart from some high profile incidents, public attention to the issue has been marginal. Yet, between July 2017 and April 2018 HRW officials conducted extensive research across multiple sites in rural Brazil, culminating in a 50-page report on the problem.[160] In addition, their work on issues such as palliative care and the abuse of agricultural labourers (from the US to Zimbabwe) appears to have been expert-driven, rather than being gauged to fit with trends in public attitudes (Interview ID: C).

On the other hand, there appears to be growing sentiment within the INGO that it must be more responsive to public opinion. One longstanding member lamented HRW's traditional reputation as an elitist organization divorced from the views of the people it is supposed to be helping, "if we want to be successful we have to be sensitive to public opinion" (Interview ID: D). Another executive member, and former divisional director, agreed that HRW had an elitist bent, and suggested that they were now in the midst of a change, "HRW is much more sensitive [to public opinion] than it was five years ago…we used to be much more elitist" (Interview ID: F). A HRW official who engages in forward-facing campaign work also expressed regret about the current neglect of public opinion – "we're not as influenced by the media or public as we should be" – but offered insight into how this is changing (Interview ID: G). The official described how her division strategized the release of content to "tap into more human related stories" and to maximize the potential support base for every action (Interview ID: G). For instance, planners would pinpoint a widely publicized event, such as World Mental Health Day, and use this as a hook to popularize their work in this area. Although the division is guided by a set of criteria in the issues they select for campaigns, they are increasingly of the mind that excessive rigidity in their approach would be counter-productive, and they must be

[159] See: https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/02/witness-shackled-years-now-free and https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/09/ghana-oversight-needed-enforce-shackling-ban
[160] https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/brazil0718_web.pdf

flexible enough to react to the public mood. On the whole, the data suggests that public opinion is not a major driver of issue prioritization but is part of an on-going discussion that could see its salience rise in coming years. To date, the public mood seems more likely to shape strategic communications rather than undergird patterns of selection.

Two additional factors – which may bridge both moral and strategic motivations – that could possibly shape patterns of selection are: 1) the gravity of the issue at hand and 2) the likelihood of HRW having a positive impact. Internal materials shared with the researcher, and that were specifically crafted for the purpose of training staff members on issue selection, reveal the importance and interdependent character of both of these factors for decision-makers. With regard to issue gravity, the training material divides this item into four different elements: the scale of the problem (the number of lives affected); severity (is the nature of the abuse violent, discriminatory, exploitative etc.); the trend (is the situation getting better or worse); and vulnerability of victims (how significant are the obstacles to addressing the problem). In terms of impact, HRW asks staff to consider whether working on a topic provides an opportunity to meet advocacy goals. More precisely, this may refer to an ability to influence when and how important meetings are held, the drafting of laws or legislation, the deployment of peacekeeping operations, media coverage, and support for stakeholders, among other outcomes of interest.

In addition to the training material, there was unanimity among those interviewed that severity was a crucial criterion for prioritisation. A deputy director in the Children's Rights division confirmed that the severity of a human rights abuse, in particular with regard to physical harm, was a core consideration for whether or not an issue would be taken on (Interview ID: I).[161] Similarly, a former leading official with several years of experience working in the Women's Rights section stated that issue selection could simply come down to "a numbers game", and that – if we construe severity in terms of the pervasiveness of an abuse – areas where a relatively small percentage of the female population are

[161] Deputy Director, Children's Rights Division.

affected, such as with sex work, are less likely to be prioritised for sustained advocacy campaigns (Interview ID: F). However, HRW officials were also cognisant of how, depending on the context, certain violations may have a broader resonance for human rights protection that goes beyond the immediate abuse. One former senior official suggested that, at times, severity may not best be measured in terms of number of deaths. For example, while crises in Darfur may have detrimentally impacted millions of lives, and US policy in Guantanamo Bay directly affected much less, HRW cannot ignore the symbolic importance of abuses committed by the world's most powerful democracy. Calculations as to the severity of specific violations may therefore be more complicated than a mere numbers game, and involve subjective judgments as to the long term consequences of violations for the global prospects of human rights (Interview ID: C). Acknowledging this complication, severity was a recurring theme in discussions with HRW staff, suggesting that it is a central determinant of issue selection.

The importance of impact, too, was manifest in discussions with HRW staff. When asked about their method of selecting between issues, every member of staff that was interviewed cited impact as a key requirement. Summarizing this sentiment, an executive member posited: "It's not just does it matter, it's can we make a difference" (Interview ID: C). Typically, when HRW takes on an issue they will formulate a set of proposals and share them with responsible party, usually a government. This gives the perpetrator of violations, or those responsible for the protection of citizens from human rights, an opportunity to take action prior to the public release of HRW's findings. This strategy emphasises the importance of change as a core policy aim. And yet, despite the insistence of staff that impact was a central driver of prioritization, the relationship between impact and issue selection appears somewhat more complicated. One executive member noted that that, in some cases – when provoking a policy change is improbable – "impact" may merely be about "keeping an issue alive" that otherwise may be removed from the public consciousness (Interview ID: D). An example is HRW's work on China and Tibet. The INGO has carried out extensive research on issues such as human rights defenders, arbitrary

detention, freedom of religion, and the plight of the Uygur population,[162] all with the expectation that policy changes are extremely unlikely. Similar can be said of the group's work on North Korea, among other dictatorships. A leader of the INGO described this approach as the "walk in the wilderness", where an issue is adopted and worked on despite very little likelihood of success (Interview ID: C). Thus, although HRW decision-makers believe in the primacy of impact, at times this criterion is eschewed work on issues deemed of sufficient importance by other metrics.

A further matter of consideration for decision-makers concerns what one staff member – involved in divisional planning – termed the "healthy tension" between planned action and emergency response. Not all of HRW's work can be foreseen in advance, and the group must be flexible enough to mobilize in reaction to political or humanitarian events that bring about changes in the human rights environment. The emergence of the Arab Spring in 2010 is one example where a significant portion of HRW's time and resources were quickly channelled to response to unforeseen events as they unfolded. Due to the fluid nature of events, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring the dynamic within the organization shifted to a much more reactive footing (Interview ID: F). Ordinarily HRW will have been already working on an affected region or subject when news of a breaking issue emerges. Recent events surrounding Wikileaks founder Julian Assange illustrate how HRW links its prior work to the need for a quick response.

As an official involved in the response to Assange outlined, for the past decade HRW have kept tabs on the Assange case, releasing statements opposing his prosecution and potential extradition to the US on the grounds that it would infringe on, and spell wider dangers for, vital press freedoms.[163] In covering Assange and Wikileaks, HRW not only possessed substantive competencies with regard to freedom of expression and the press, but developed detailed knowledge of this individual case. Thus,

[162] The 2019 regional report can be accessed here: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/china-and-tibet

[163] For an early example of this work, see: https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/12/15/us-dont-prosecute-wikileaks-founder

in April 2019 when Assange was arrested by UK authorities at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, those within HRW who dealt with his case felt obliged to produce a rapid response. Internally, an email thread was generated and individuals and divisions who may have an interest in the case – the accusations of rape levelled against Assange meant the case was also of interest to Women's Division – held extensive discussions to co-ordinate a response. HRW acted to communicate their position quickly in the media and ensured that statements were vetted to be consistent with the positions of concerned divisions (Interview ID: C). Although the intensity of work for decision-makers increased, HRW's work on the Assange case illustrates how emergency response is commonly linked to an existing program of work. In this way, the importance of the Assange issue – something that appears related to severity, broadly conceived – for journalistic freedoms, as well as an element of path dependency,[164] appear to have combined to shape issue prioritization.

On the other hand, rather than being an extension of earlier work, external events may cause a fundamental shift in the day-to-day operations of HRW. This appears to have been the case for HRW's US division upon the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States. Since his election, the US division has not only paid more attention to issues surrounding authoritarianism and populism – quite a new departure for the group – but has found itself in a period of internal turbulence. "The election of Trump totally upended the US division" and has "changed a million things", one divisional director in the US office noted (Interview ID: G). HRW's contacts in the White House and State Department dried up, and they could no longer use their positive working relationship with the US government as a form of leverage against other governments. Instead of taking an affirmative approach to human rights, the group was now obliged to adopt a defence posture and "hold the line" on a number of issue areas, such as on immigration and the treatment of those crossing the US border at Mexico. Moreover, members of the US division and HRW more broadly believed Trump's election was emboldening regressive behaviour by autocrats globally, a

[164] The role of path dependency is difficult to ascertain, as it is highly likely HRW would have formulated a robust response to the Assange case irrespective of previously working on Assange and Wikileaks.

trend which necessitated a fight to defend rights which had already been established. Movement in the external human rights environment had effectively tied the hands of HRW, in particular its US division, constraining the degrees of freedom it had to make choices on prioritization (Interview ID: G). Whilst this may represent a small portion of HRW's overall work, changes in external conditions under Trump go some way to explaining the shift.

Heuristics and Issue Selection

Before analysing the effects of cognitive heuristics, we can point to two important aspects of the decision-making process which suggest the plausibility of psychological determinants. First, as described above, the issue ranking process affords significant discretion to senior figures and small numbers of individuals. HRW's internal style of governance is consciously hierarchical and undemocratic, with the heads of thematic areas and large regional divisions, such as those in India and Brazil, exerting considerable influence over what HRW works on and when. Although the organization may address this matter in its internal review, at present it appears that key individuals and small groups of decision-makers have a major say in issue selection. Second, HRW currently lacks personnel and internal measures dedicated to the monitoring and evaluation of its program activities. The absence of reliable data in these areas makes organization learning disorderly and the human rights impact of policy choices uncertain. Further, despite a proliferation in the number and substantive issue areas HRW now works on, the INGO does not have a standardized method of adjudicating between them. The result is a potential gap between normative intent on the part of decision-makers and the capacity to objectively rank priorities. The organizational features of HRW, as well as the role of individual personalities in ranking generating process, are therefore consistent with the observable implications of the study's theory.

If the traits of individual personalities are of causal import, it is another question as to which of their characteristics help determine issue ranking. The study highlights the potential impact of three

heuristics, each of which will now be evaluated. Recalling the availability heuristic, it suggested that decision-makings may be more likely to prioritize issues if they involve instances of vivid suffering, such as the perpetration of violence and bodily harm. The empirical evidence does appear to show that decision-makers are particularly concerned with vivid abuses of human rights, especially those associated with violence and attacks on the physical integrity of victims. Internal training material on the uptake of new projects reveals that severity is a core ingredient for selection. In these documents, severity is conceived of in substantive rather than merely numerical terms, with killings, sexual violence, exploitation, and discrimination providing an informal spectrum of the most serious rights violations.[165] Although HRW regards human rights as indivisible, and the group works on an extraordinary expanse of issue areas – many of which do not include violations of physical integrity – it does appear that threats of killing or serious violence are of particular concern, and that this perspective translates from the training material to actual policy behaviour.

The response of HRW to the drug war enacted by Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte illustrates how the group seems to act to prioritise violent abuses. In 2016, under the auspice of combating a pervasive drug problem in the Philippines, Duterte authorized a campaign of extrajudicial killing of individuals reputedly involved in the drugs trade. According to police, 6,600 have been killed in the violence, while activists have suggested the real figure more closely approximates 27,000 (BBC, 2019). Before becoming president, Duterte had attracted the criticism of HRW for supporting the use of death squads while mayor of Davao City.[166] However, after he assumed presidential office, HRW felt compelled to divert serious attention to events in the Philippines.

A HRW official involved in the deliberations explained that, once extrajudicial killings escalated under Duterte's presidency, the priorities of the INGO quickly shifted. Although the fact that

[165] Internal document shared with the researcher.
[166] HRW reported on Duterte as early as 2009: https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/04/06/you-can-die-any-time/death-squad-killings-mindanao

Duterte was previously on HRW's radar aided researchers, the group now deemed the wave of violence in the Philippines to be "too egregious" to go without a substantial response (Interview ID: D). Early in Duterte's reign Phelim Kine, Deputy Director of HRW's Asia Division, published a piece entitled "Asia's 'Shoot-to-Kill' Republic", which criticised what data suggested was "an alarming increase in police killings of drug-related criminal suspects" (Kine 2016). Shortly after Brad Adams, Executive Director of the Asia Division, issued a letter to Duterte directly that contained a comprehensive set of proposals concerning the killings. The letter also covered other human rights issues such as accountability for the security forces, attacks on indigenous populations, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and Children's Rights.[167] Since Duterte's election in 2016, HRW have conducting extensive research and case studies on the violence, producing hundreds of news releases, reports, and commentary.[168] The grievous nature of the killings was instrumental in HRW's decision to take swift and detailed action (Interview ID: D).

The heightened sense of importance attached to flagrant violations of physical integrity rights is also evident in the documentary record, as well as the public-facing output of the organization. Consider HRW's work on the environment, a topic not as immediately associable with egregious suffering as issues such as torture, killings, or arms trafficking. In the group's executive overview connecting the environment to human rights, the third sentence refers to the "intimidation, legal harassment and deadly violence" that may be faced by environmental activists (HRW 2019). The prominence of focus on attacks on activists and human rights defenders – areas well-covered by other sections – in HRW's environmental agenda, suggests the primacy of these forms of violations in the minds of decision-makers. Similarly, the women's rights division works on a diverse array of issue areas, from the plight of female labourers to access to education and reproductive healthcare. Notable among the

[167] A copy of the letter can be viewed at: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/160803_letter_from_hrw_to_president_rodrigo_duterte_.pdf

[168] For an sample case study, see: https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/video/2017/03/01/killed-philippines-case-1

division's work are issues such as trafficking, forced labour, sex slavery, deaths related to pregnancy, and rape in conflict zones. Again we observe that issues with strong elements of physical integrity concerns feature prominently in how the group prioritizes women's rights (HRW 2019). In addition, the disability rights division has sought to emphasise how many individuals with disabilities live in conflict zones and are "subjected to violence and discrimination" (HRW 2019). The disability team has also worked extensively on the problem of shackling, where people – commonly those with psychosocial disabilities – are physically chained to objects such as beds and cement blocks.

Moreover, with issue themes that are more traditionally linked to physical harm, such as torture or the use of prohibited arms, there is a patent connection between vivid instances of bodily harm and prioritization. The HRW division webpage on (counter-)terrorism, for example, opens by denouncing "violent acts by non-state groups" as "abhorrent crimes", and noting that "governments have a responsibility to protect those within their jurisdiction from extremist attacks…" (HRW 2019). Below this, the section introduces related topics such as the rights to life, protection from torture and ill-treatment, and to a fair trial, before then mentioning the need to safeguard free expression and assembly. As these examples suggest, when broaching issue selection HRW decision-makers are not only concerned with "how many" are suffering, but also "in what way" they are suffering.

While the evidence appears consistent with availability – decision-makers will rank issues higher on their list of priorities if they involve instances of egregious suffering – psychology may not be the only explanation. For instance, one might argue that it is the media that are most interested in issues involving violence and other forms of extreme suffering, as these may better attract the attention of the general public. HRW may therefore tackle such issues to gain access to media coverage, generate momentum for policy change, and attract potential donors. Although plausible, the interviews did not unearth this kind of reasoning process among HRW officials. It is true that HRW often seek to shape media coverage, mobilize public opinion, and attract donors, but this behaviour is part of a general strategy that is not focused on violations of physical integrity, extending as it does throughout

all of HRW's work. Perhaps inevitably, the considerations that determine issue selection seem multi-faceted. However, despite HRW's commitment to the indivisibility of human rights and its diverse agenda, it does appear that decision-makers feel compelled to act against particularly egregious forms of abuse. Of course, not all issues that HRW work on involve these kinds of violations, but their presence appears to have a significant effect on the ranking generation process.

Moving to representative heuristic, the implications of which suggest officials' reason about issue selection through analogies to past cases. The evidence appears to provide mixed support for use of the representative heuristic. It does seem clear that analogous reasoning and reflection plays a role in issue selection. When asked about how this form of reflection might feature in HRW's decision-making process, one executive member regarded this kind of exercise as vital to the work that they do, especially in terms of learning from past errors. The member noted how HRW tend to "reflect a lot on missed chances", and that they are eager to use past cases to inform their work in the present (Interview ID: C). However, the procedural basis for this form of learning appears informal and unevenly developed throughout the group, with the initiative to engage in it largely resting with individual division leaders. A former divisional director conceded that, while the group was starting to build capacity for evaluating past cases – "we do have those learning conversations" – to their mind "not a lot" of systematic assessments were currently taking place (Interview ID: F).

The fact that makeshift attempts at organizational learning and case comparison are being made by the heads of thematic and regional divisions adds credence to the study's theoretical claims. Assessing complex issue scenarios over time, without the benefit of standardized procedures or a definite methodology, suggests that decision-makers may rely on heuristic-led judgments. Additionally, because learning and evaluation appears to take place on an ad-hoc basis among small teams, with most of the authority vested in team leaders, there is little in the way of bureaucratic checks and balances to mitigate potential biases. The reasoning process vis-à-vis inter-issue comparison, as well

as freedom afforded to small groups of individuals by the organizational structure, appear broadly consistent with the observable implications of the representative heuristic.

Consider HRW's work on women and armed conflict. Traditionally, women's rights have not been at the core of the human rights agenda, nor prominent in the early work of HRW. Once gender issues began to gain traction as a distinct area of human rights concern, decision-makers noted that in conflict situations – a more typical site of HRW activity – the treatment of women tended to be side-lined by policy planners.[169] Internal teams identified areas of thematic crossover that aligned with the group's mission, and the dedicated women's rights division began working on the issue of women and armed conflict. Under this rubric, HRW have highlighted the physical and sexual violence, lack of sufficient services, and marginalization faced by women in conflict situations.[170]

How might we explain the adoption of this strain of work in the women's division? There appears to be a couple of contributing factors. For instance, the manner in which HRW connected and extended its existing work on conflict to women's issues is suggestive of a process of path dependency. When HRW decided to allocate specific resources to working on women in conflict, much of the organizational infrastructure and expertise to analyse human rights violations associated with armed conflict was already in place. This state of affairs seems to have eased the transition to working on challenges faced by victims groups that are particularly vulnerable during wars, such as women. However, although the past work and organizational make-up of HRW may have provided auspicious conditions for selecting this new issue area, the precise impetus for working on women in armed conflict seems more ambiguous. Staff in the women's rights division have long been cognisant of egregious examples of gender-specific violence during conflicts – such as the use of rape as a weapon of war in China in 1937-38, Bangladesh in 1971, and Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s,

[169] For more information on this aspect of HRW's work, see: https://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights/women-and-armed-conflict
[170] Ibid.

among many other instances – and motivated to fight against a repeat of such cases. Drawing contemporary analogies to these acts of violence, as well as exploring the policy lessons they give rise to, is an integral aspect of the division's planning work. It is not only the group's existing body of work, but findings brought to the table by competent researchers, that informs intra-divisional discussions on agenda-setting (Interview ID: F). Disentangling the exact impact of each of these prospective causal drivers of selection is difficult, not least due to the limitations of observational data for assessing psychological postulates. What we can say is that it appears both the existing expertise and architecture of HRW, as well as the use of analogous reasoning involving past cases, helped to gear the women's rights division toward prioritizing women in armed conflict, and most especially its focus on physical and sexual violence.

Examining the development of issue selection over time, as well as speaking with experienced HRW officials, it does appear that HRW's priorities today are partially determined by processes of path dependence. Moreover, these processes seem complementary to the heuristic-led account. The representative heuristic may provide a mechanism of positive feedback necessary for path dependence to occur amid disorderly organizational learning. Consider HRW's current efforts to build up its expertise in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AIntel), which is an instructive case. When officials within HRW recognised that certain applications of AIntel may have deleterious implications for human rights, the group already had an experienced researcher examining topics such as platform governance and freedom of speech, a staff member who specialized in surveillance, and had a researcher focused on the 'police cloud' apparatus and surveillance in China. In various ways, HRW was already active on topics that had thematic overlap with the abuses of AIntel that decision-makers wished to highlight. Officials could also draw on analogies to this work to situate AIntel issues within a human rights framework, as well as to assess the ethical stakes they could potentially give rise to. Future AIntel work therefore had a solid foundation in terms of preliminary expertise, issue reference frames, and relevant contact networks.

An official involved in the discussions around AIntel remarked that, as it had applications in terms of automated weaponry, there was a natural connection to be drawn between AIntel and the groups arms division (Interview ID: C). Traditionally, the arms division was concerned with obligations on the prohibition of weapons such as antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions. With the advance of technology their remit has widened, now covering risks to civilians associated with the use of automated weapons. The thematic overlap between AIntel and the arms division is exemplified by the latter's participation in the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, led by a coalition of NGOs formed in 2012 and coordinated by an official from HRW's arms division.[171] The fact that HRW possessed a baseline of related expertise, and were already active on issues closely related to AIntel, appears to have created auspicious conditions for the uptake of AIntel as a new issue. This is something decision-makers are conscious of, and plays a part in their thinking (Interview ID: C). Of course, it may be reasonably argued that, due to its growing relevance in the world, HRW would have, at some future timepoint, selected AIntel for attention irrespective of its organizational inheritances. In this case, path dependence may have simply expedited that process.

Regarding the affect heuristic, the study finds mixed evidence. Interviews with staff supports the claim that personal attachment to particular issue areas may heighten emotional salience among staff, in turn shaping preferences for selection. One senior figure, who works across program divisions with a large number of staff, argued that the upbringing and cultural background of staff seemed to shape how they thought about issue priorities. For example, the official believed staff from the global south had different perspectives on the relative importance of issues such as poverty and civil and political rights, when compared to those raised in Western countries.[172] The official pointed to the increasing diversity of the demographics among staff, and the viewpoints these individuals bring, as an explanation for the widening of HRW's spectrum of work and expertise. That regional divisions have a large role in agenda-setting speaks to this dynamic, as executive officials surmise that regional

[171] See: https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/about/
[172] Interview ID: F

staff are motivated to select issues with greater applicability and cultural salience within their political and geographical setting. Linked to this, the staff that select into an organization such as HRW tend to have connections to certain areas of human rights protection, both in terms of personal experience and, as a corollary, the development of related competencies, and this informs their perspectives on prioritization (Interview ID: F).

On the other hand, the interviews revealed a broadly held scepticism that victim identity was a substantial consideration. A staff member with decades of service at HRW intimated that "neutrality is essential" to sustaining the INGO and achieving its aims. This means that in cases such as the civil wars in Yemen and Syria, HRW must "analyse both sides…track all the actors" (Interview ID: D). In the case of Syria, for example, not only did this include the governing Assad regime and non-state armed groups such as the Islamic State, but also the behaviour of third party interventions by the US, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah.[173] To do otherwise would be to invite accusation of bias that could damage their reputation as an independent force, foment feelings of distrust among donors and governments, and ultimately limit their organizational impact. The HRW official further explained that the group made a deliberate effort to not focus solely on victim groups that suffer extreme marginalization, "if you only work on the 'other' you cement a negative narrative…you need to convince normal people that human rights are there to protect them too" (Interview ID: D). These comments suggest a calculated policy to work on issues affecting a wide range of victim groups, so as to speak to the population at large about the relevance of human rights protections. The logic of HRW's decision-making therefore seems to contradict the role of affect, as it appears more calculated and geared toward a wide spectrum of victims.

[173] A sample of this approach can be viewed in HRW's 2018 report on the Syrian conflict: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/syria

Of course, one of the limitations of interview data for evaluating the impact of affect is that, if HRW were partial to certain kinds of victims, their own officials would be reluctant to reveal as much. This raises the potential for discrepancy between the real and stated preferences of decision-makers. Acknowledging this, we can discern competing issue agendas among HRW divisions, depending on their geographical location. The regional teams outside of the US, for instance, have played a stronger role in pushing social, economic, and cultural rights, than their American counterparts, who tend to focus on civil and political rights. Another example has been recent discussions over the role of the market in healthcare provision, and to what extent medical care should be purchasable commodity. Here again there appears to be a division between those from US and non-US backgrounds. As one senior official on the program side of the INGO notes, "culture and geography have played a role in these conversations" (Interview ID: F). What these differences appear to show is that cultural background may well impact the substantive nature of the issues decision-makers believe should be prioritized. However, there appears to be little evidence that the attributes of victim populations shape HRW's agenda.

4.5 Prioritizing Children's Rights: Attacks on Education and Child Sex Trafficking

To further assess the relative causal drivers of issue selection in HRW, it is useful to track the motivational logic of prioritization with regard to two specific, positive and negative cases of adoption. Presently, the chapter will discuss in more detail decision-making in the group's children's rights division, by examining an issue officials have decided to work on, attacks on education (positive case), and an issue they have decided not to work on, child sex trafficking (negative case). The positive case refers to "…attacks on school infrastructure and on teachers and students; the occupation of schools by the police and military; harassment and threats against teachers, parents, and students; and the recruitment of children from schools to become soldiers" (HRW 2019g). The negative case alludes to the recruitment, transfer, exploitation, and sexual abuse of children, often under threat of harm or other forms of coercion.

The origins of HRW's work on attacks on education can be traced to preliminary field work carried out by its official in countries such as Afghanistan, India, Thailand, and Iraq. Initially, the staff missions were aimed at different concerns. In her book, *Campaigning for Children: Strategies for Advancing Children's Rights*, Jo Becker (2017), the Advocacy Director of the children's rights division, provides an informed account of how this process unfolded. In Afghanistan in 2003, which is an illustrative case, Becker recounts how HRW sent a researcher named Zama Coursen-Neff to investigate serious violations being carried out by militias, such as extortion and rape. While there, local informants told Coursen-Neff about a series of attacks taking place against schools. When Coursen-Neff raised the issue with the government and various agencies, she was not only met with a reluctance to acknowledge the problem, but found that the issue was not being tracked at all. In 2005 she returned to Afghanistan to investigate attacks on education specifically, documenting over 200 attacks and "entire districts…where all schools had closed and teachers had left in the face of continuing attacks and threats" (Becker 2017, p. 153). In 2006, the murder of Safia Ama Jan, the Director of Women's Affairs in Kandahar and an education advocate under the Taliban, caused international outrage. The killing prompted UNESCO to commission a significant report – relying in part on HRW research – on attacks on education globally[174]. Shortly after, various NGOs and UN agencies came together to form the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEM) (Becker 2017, p. 154).

Research trips by HRW staff in India, Thailand, and Iraq produced similar results. HRW's researchers identified what they believed to be a critical but underserved issue area in the human rights movement. At this point, despite pervasive attacks on education across many countries, the issue had yet to figure in the global human rights agenda. There were no legalist norms or concerned campaigns to end or regulate the practice. Prior to 2010, "they [the attacks] received little attention beyond the local communities where they took place" (Becker 2017, p. 152). A HRW official who

[174] The UNESCO report is available here:
http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/186303e.pdf

participated in the group's early years of research noted that there was "no real stigma" attached to the use of education facilities during war, and HRW was the "first major INGO to look systematically at the issue" (Interview ID: I).[175] In recent years the children's rights division has built up considerable experience and capacity on the issue, publishing extensive reports in several countries affected by conflict, such as Ukraine, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among others.[176] The group is currently co-chair of GCPEM, has contributed to the development of the Safe Schools Declaration,[177] and played a significant part in building global norms around the protection of education.

As the above indicates, HRW do not appear to have determined to work on attacks on education due to prevailing human rights norms. Rather, the group were cognisant that such norms did not exist, and subsequently endeavoured to help construct them. Nor does there seem to have been clear material incentives driving selection. The issue had come to the attention of researchers organically, through discussions with local informants, while they were engaged with a different set of problems. Initial research was not conducted on the basis of donor funding, but the discovery of a neglected problem by researchers active in area of conflict. Having engaged in this work, because the issue went unrecognized for so long there was no ready-made funding source or constituency to appeal to. In fact, by taking the issue forward in Afghanistan HRW ran the risk of creating friction with UN and government agencies, some of whom "admitted that they didn't want to bring attention to the problem because they were afraid that it would prompt donors to end desperately needed funding for Afghanistan's education system (Becker 2017, p. 153). Moreover, because so few NGOs and international agencies had paid attention to the issue, or recognized it as a human rights challenge at all, there was essentially no pressure coming from HRW's organizational environment.

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[175] Deputy Director at Children's Rights Division.

[176] For a sample of this reporting, see HRW's 2017 report on Pakistan entitled: "Dreams Turned into Nightmares" Attacks on Students, Teachers, and Schools in Pakistan", see: https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/03/27/dreams-turned-nightmares/attacks-students-teachers-and-schools-pakistan

[177] The Safe Schools Declaration is "an inter-governmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict", and is available online at: https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/safe_schools_declaration.pdf

Why, then, did HRW decide to adopt the issue? The first thing to note is that the decision rested in the hands of a small groups of individuals within the children's rights division. This was not an edict passed down from the executive, or another section of the organization. Those who identified the problem area had considerable discretion as to whether or not to integrate it into the division's existing agenda, "while we have to be savvy to what the general interests of the organization are, we felt no central pressure" (Interview ID: I). Interviews with officials suggest one primary reason the issue was selected for attention was that it fit quite neatly with pre-existing work and expertise in the children's rights division. As a leading member of the children's rights division stated, "we had already been working on the right to education for 20 years", with attacks on education seemingly a natural area of progression (Interview ID: J).[178] The competencies the division had developed through its broader work on children's education meant that the transition to working on attacks on education was less of a radical shift than it might otherwise have been. In this sense, a process of path dependency appears to have taken place, where the past decisions on issue selection within the division had a bearing on subsequent policy choices.

Although the division's existing competencies provided favourable circumstances for the adoption of attacks on education, in and of itself this does not appear to explain why the issue was ultimately integrated into the division's work. On this basis alone, it is not axiomatic that attacks on education would become a distinct area of selection. In some ways, one might have expected the close proximity of the issue to existing competencies to actually work against its adoption. As one HRW official pointed out, bringing together the discrete issues of education and conflict in this way was an unusual approach for the group, "combining different issues hadn't been done before, it was a novel approach" (Interview ID: I). Existing competencies therefore appear to have been part of the story but cannot account for the final outcome.

[178] Senior management in Children's Rights Division.

Conversations with HRW officials reveal a number of contributing factors that may have tipped the balance toward selection. For instance, the very fact that the issue was multidimensional, incorporating as it did cases of extreme forms of violence aimed at schools, seems to have been of causal import. As with the murder of Safia Ama Jan, which shocked and galvanised UN agencies, knowing that vulnerable children were under threat of violence precipitated a vigorous response from staff in the children's rights division. Central to the decision was "the number of kids affected, balanced against the severity of the abuse", two criteria that attacks on education was judged to have met (Interview ID: I). Research in a number of countries had shown that the problem was a pervasive one. Moreover, because the attacks put children "at risk of injury or death" and created "an environment of violence and fear", HRW officials felt – irrespective of uncertainty of how tangible the impact might be – a compunction to do something (HRW 2019).

An additional factor that appears to have moved the needle towards adoption is a perception that the issue was underserved by the human rights movement. In explaining the division's methodology, an official noted that along with the number of children being affected and the severity of the violation, whether or not other organizations were already working on the topic was a major focal point in selection (Interview ID: J). Initial fact-finding missions suggested the problem of attacks on education was widespread in several regions, yet had only attracted the attention of local actors with limited resources. Although the possibility of achieving positive impact on attacks on education may have been remote in the early years of adoption – HRW staff had encountered a reluctance for policymakers to recognize the problem as such – the pervasiveness of the issue and the fact that very little work was being done to tackle it seems to have played a significant role in its adoption by HRW.

Conversely, how might we explain the non-adoption of sex trafficking of children by HRW's children's rights division? Analytically speaking, it is more difficult to identify clear reasons for why an issue has not been taken up, in part because there is no meaningful documentary record and

inferences are reliant on the memory of those interviewed. Moreover, it is especially difficult to explain why an issue has not been selected when it has not been on the radar of the division and has not been meaningfully discussed. One of the advantages of analysing the non-adoption of sex trafficking and children is that the children's rights division actively discussed it and made a conscious choice not to make it a priority.[179]

It is first worth noting that, although group competencies appear to form part of a plausible explanation for why the children's rights division decided to select attacks on education, it seems of less explanatory import in terms of the non-adoption child sex trafficking. Over a number of years the children's rights division, as well as HRW more generally, has engaged with a stable of issue areas that are closely proximate to child sex trafficking in terms of substantive content and required competencies. The women's rights division, for example, have carried out extensive research and advocacy on sexual violence, trafficking, and child brides.[180] Pertinently, HRW have also produced detailed reports on the trafficking of girls and boys for exploitation in regions such as West Africa,[181] an area that has direct overlap with child sex trafficking. In addition, different parts of the INGO have highlighted severe human rights violations pertaining to the trafficking of child brides (e.g. from Myanmar[182] and Pakistan[183] to China) that represents a form of child sex trafficking. In light of this, it is puzzling why the children's rights division decided not to work on child sex trafficking given the group had developed substantial competencies in related areas, including touching on the topic itself.

Evidence from staff interviews suggests that the decision not to select sex trafficking of children for attention may have been in part determined by how well served the issue judged to have been. The

[179] A limitation of this analytical strategy is that the constitutive nature of issues that have been consciously discussed by HRW may be different to those which have not been, making generalization to all cases of non-adoption difficult.
[180] Materials and press releases relating to HRW's advocacy in each of the areas can be accessed at the following link: https://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights
[181] For a sample of this research, see: https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/togo0403/
[182] See: https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/21/interview-why-brides-myanmar-are-trafficked-china
[183] See: https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/26/pakistan-should-heed-alarm-bells-over-bride-trafficking

interviews highlighted a consensus among staff in the division that the existence of charitable organizations, NGOs, and coalitions – such as ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking), Save the Children, Anti-Slavery International, UNICEF, among others – dedicated to research and advocacy on child sex trafficking meant the issue was not top of HRW's agenda: "if these other groups are working on it, do we want to make it one of our five priorities?...we go where we can make the biggest contribution" (Interview ID: J). This said, the interviews also revealed a somewhat contradictory attitude among decision-makers toward participation in advocacy coalitions. HRW participate in multiple coalitions of this kind; they continue to participate in the network which has developed around attacks on education. The benefits of grouped efforts are manifold – including the pooling of resources and maximizing advocacy pressure – and HRW officials are acutely aware of the strategic benefits of coalescing around an issue with other organizations, with one noting that the division "tends to do better" on issues which they collaborate and commit years to (Interview 6). This seemingly inconsistent approach to jointly working on issues that other organizations are active with suggests that relative issue coverage in the human rights network cannot solely account for positive and negative cases of selection.

When asked to explain why child sex trafficking had been overlooked, one HRW official involved in the discussion around it conceded that, in their view, "there is no good reason why" (Interview ID: I). The concession that the policy outcome lacked a well-defined rationale indicates that it did not result from the systematic adherence to identified metrics for selection, and is consistent with the use of heuristics. Although child sex trafficking may have matched with the division's established and informal criteria for selection, the issue evidently lacked support within the division. It is instructive that a senior staff member posited that "if a researcher wanted to work on it, we might find a way to do it", assuming they could make a convincing argument that the issue fitted well with the divisions' ethos and met the usual criteria (Interview ID: J). Given that a staff member involved in the decision stated that there was no compelling reason why the issue had not being taken on, and the group had already worked on several proximate issues, it is reasonable to conclude that a convincing argument

could be formulated for adoption. The division appears flexible enough to have worked on the issue if a research had felt strongly enough about it. Simply put, the issue appears to have been passed over because it lacked impetus from an individual or set of decision-makers who were willing to champion it, not because of any constitutive properties of the issue itself.

In respect of the study's theory, the empirical evidence surrounding the (non-)adoption of both human rights issues provides mixed results. Consistent with theoretical expectations, it seems clear that the ranking generating process was in large part shaped by the preferences of key individuals in the children's rights division. The division will "share ideas with management" and "the chain of command goes both ways", but typically the decisional power on selection rests with the division and its experts (Interview ID: J). Furthermore, as predicted, it does not appear that theories associated with the conventional paradigms of constructivism and rational choice theory can account for the discrepant policy outcomes. As highlighted by HRW officials, various aspects of attacks on education, the positive case of selection, were not prohibited under international law and no norm or stigma had been developed at the time of adoption. On the other hand, there are strong international norms[184] against the trafficking of children for sex, the negative case. Similarly, there were no clear material incentives for HRW to begin tackling attacks on education. If anything, the opposite is true, as HRW researchers were met with reluctance on the part of government policy-makers and international agencies to take the issue seriously. It does not appear that, by virtue of taking the issue on, an increase in HRW's funding/support or an easy win on policy impact were probable outcomes. It therefore seems unlikely that HRW's policy behaviour in these two instances can be best explained by adherence to a logic of appropriateness or utility maximization.

[184] In 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. For more information see: https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/thematic-areas/transnational-threats/trafficking-in-persons/

In terms of the availability heuristic, which predicts that decision-makers may be more likely to prioritize issues if they involve instances of vivid suffering, it does appear that the arresting and evocative nature of attacks on education contributed to its adoption by HRW researchers. Staff in the children's rights division appear to have judged that children, parents, and teachers existing in a climate of intimidation and facing risks of extreme injury or death, was an intolerably egregious situation. The violent element of the multidimensional issue seems to have concentrated minds and had an impact on officials' views on the severity of the violations, in the end aiding adoption. In contrast, evidence for the representative heuristic is less promising. One might note that, during the course of the selection process, the children's rights division made comparisons to other forms of attacks on vulnerable populations and civilian infrastructure. However, the explanatory power of this mode of reasoning appears limited, given that such analogising was also present in the negative case. There was no shortage of historical examples of sexual violence and trafficking for HRW researchers to appeal to during internal deliberations, yet this failed to motivate selection. The representative heuristic may well have been at work, but it does not seem to have been a deciding factor in reaching different policy outcomes in the positive and negative cases.

Finally, there is some evidence that the affect heuristic had a causal impact on the divergent outcomes. As noted, staff struggled to give a good reason why child sex trafficking was overlooked. They also acknowledged that they may well have worked on the issue if a researcher wished to do so. This lack of clarity in the rationale of staff suggests that heuristic-led decision-making may be at play. The agency of individuals also seems causally relevant; recognition that the division may have worked on the issue if an individual was sufficiently animated by it suggests that the personal, affective response of staff may impact outcomes. Conversely, the contrasting fortunes of the issues of attacks on education and child sex trafficking can be put down to affective associations with the victim group. Interview participants were adamant that considerations victim identity contravene the group's ethos. Further, there does not appear to be an appreciable difference in perceptions of victim identities between those affected by attacks on education and child sex trafficking. Both issues are

primarily focused on violations against the rights of vulnerable children across several distinct territories.

4.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to examine the motivational logic that underpins contrasting patterns of issue selection in Human Rights Watch. By its nature, HRW is a unique organization. Its distinctive features as one of the world's most influential human rights INGOs not only making it an insightful site of inquiry, but also presents analytical challenges in evaluating the study's theory of issue selection. The chapter has provided details on the origin and development of HRW, and it is sufficient here to reflect on a number of associative factors that may have helped to shape empirical findings.

HRW is commonly viewed as a gatekeeper in the human rights network. It has significant resources, the capacity to work on a diverse array of issue areas, and extensive reach with media and policymakers. The issues it prioritizes often have downstream effects on the agenda of other human rights groups and international agencies. HRW's influential position in its organizational environment means that smaller INGOs are also likely to place demands on it, and to try to shift its priorities to align with their own preferences. With regard to internal configuration, its hierarchical structure, professional orientation, and relatively small number of global staff means it is an agile and adaptive organization. HRW's decision-makers unencumbered by mechanisms of accountability to a membership base or an otherwise convoluted process of selection. Considerable discretion in issue adoption is therefore afforded to individuals, such as the leaders of thematic and regional teams. Furthermore, analysis of issue prioritization is complicated by instability in the ranking generating process. At the time of research, HRW was engaged in a comprehensive internal review, the outcome of which may affect the process and metrics that determine issue selection. Analytically speaking, this makes HRW something of a moving target, and adds temporal caveats to the chapter's findings.

The chapter findings align with a number of the study's theoretical expectations. First, it appears that key decision-makers have not only identified a selection dilemma but exert significant sway over how it is resolved, suggesting the relevance of individual psychological traits in issue selection. The organizational structure of HRW, as well as its selection process, seems conducive to individual officials influencing the selection process. Second, explanations based on norms or organizational self-interest do not seem capable of explaining final outcomes in issue ranking. In fact, in the case of attacks on education, an area of prioritization in HRW's children's rights division, there was a marked lack of international norms and stigma surrounding it. There were also no clear material or reputational incentives to adopt the issue, as HRW were met with early opposition from governments and policy-makers. Third, the evidence supports the claim that issue selection is a multi-causal process; factors such as the scale of the violations, severity of harm, probability of impact, path dependency, the presence of external shock such as 9/11, and issue coverage by the human rights network, all appear causally relevant, depending on the particular issue. This highlights the inevitable role of contingency in selection. The analysis also allows us to dismiss more peripheral factors, such as media attention, which seems of little causal import to choice outcomes in HRW.

In addition to the aforementioned variables, the chapter finds evidence for the availability heuristic, with perceptions that an issue involves vivid suffering appearing to move the needle toward selection. The presence of extreme violence and violations of physical integrity rights seems to have shaped HRW's response to cases such as Duterte's anti-drug campaign in the Phillipines, as well attacks on education. On the other hand it should be acknowledge that, given that the child sex trafficking case encompasses different forms of violence and was a negative case of selection, the empirical record does not provide uniform support for the effect of availability. In respect of the representative heuristic, the data provides mixed support. Reflecting on missed opportunities and drawing analogies to previous cases is an important aspect of the deliberation process on selection. The fact that such exercises are implemented on an informal and uneven basis throughout the INGO, with discretion

for organizational learning resting with individual division leaders, provides credence to the theory. Making comparisons between complex issue scenarios over time, without the benefit of standardized procedures or a definite methodology, suggests that decision-makers may rely on the representative heuristic. Yet, despite finding evidence for representativeness, both in the general decisional procedures of HRW and in specific cases of adoption, the chapter's more detailed examination of choice outcomes on the issues of attacks on education and child sex trafficking found little evidence for the predictions for its operation.

Lastly, the chapter finds some evidence for the influence of affect on selection. Interviews with staff support the claim that personal attachment to particular issue areas may heighten emotional salience among staff, in turn shaping preferences for selection. In the paired comparison, the fact that staff struggled to give a good reason why child sex trafficking was overlooked, and they acknowledged that they may well have worked on the issue if a researcher was sufficiently animated about it, indicates that the affective response of individual officials can help determine selection choices. However, interviews with staff members, as well as documentary evidence surrounding patterns of adoption, suggest that affective associations with particular victim groups do not affect the motivations of decision-makers and are of little causal import.

Chapter 5: Case Study III – Oxfam

5.1 Introduction

Since its emergence during the Second World War, perhaps no INGO has been more synonymous with the cause of global poverty and inequality as Oxfam. As with its counterpart cases Amnesty International and HRW, Oxfam enjoys a global reputation in its organizational field and may be considered – in part by virtue of its capacity to shift global policy discussions – a gatekeeper among INGOs in the humanitarian sector. Although the INGO has increasingly integrated its agenda on poverty relief within a rights-based approach, in contrast to the former cases, Oxfam implements its strategic plans through a multidimensional advocacy model (Aaronson and Zimmerman 2006). The group's operations include research, investigation, and campaigning, emergency response, the production and distribution of reports, fundraising, and advocacy for policy changes across state and corporate governance. A distinctive feature of this case is therefore its commitment to service delivery on the ground. The INGO's work includes the provision of humanitarian relief and the development of local capacities, such as building civil society and infrastructure for needs like water and sanitation.[185] According to Bob (2007, p. 3), we might conceptually distinguish between advocacy INGOs – such as Amnesty and HRW – and "service" INGOs "…which provide goods, services, institutions, or ideas directly to a population." Oxfam operates at the intersection of these models. In terms of theory-testing, as a large INGO with a confederate structure, a comparatively narrow substantive focus on development issues, and one which is active in service delivery – project work of this kind is more often tied to external funding bodies than with human rights advocacy – Oxfam appears to represent a difficult test for the study's theory.

The thematically narrow set of issues traditionally associated with development and humanitarian organizations – as opposed to human rights groups – means that selection poses a slightly different

[185] More information on Oxfam's work can be viewed here, under the "What we Do" section https://www.oxfam.org/en

challenge for officials. The ethos of the INGO is manifest in how it frames its identity – national affiliates describe themselves as the "leading charity fighting poverty", while much of Oxfam's communications cite positive impact on poverty as their goal.[186] Oxfam International characterizes the group as "a global movement of people who are fighting inequality to beat poverty together."[187] One might therefore expect selection decisions to be circumscribed within this issue space. And yet, despite this outward focus on poverty, the issue areas Oxfam perceives within its remit has gradually proliferated. Issues such as climate change, healthcare, indigenous peoples, gender and violence, child sex trafficking, and education form part of an increasingly broad agenda.[188] This has coincided with a shift in understanding in how the INGO bases its approach to development and humanitarianism, with "the conscious choice to center all programming on a rights-based approach and to emphasize economic, social, and cultural rights" (Offenheiser and Holcombe 2003, p. 269).

Oxfam's work is informed by strategic plan which provides a "vision" or general orientation for officials, both operationally and in terms of humanitarian goals. The plan may be regarded as "the strategy that all affiliates of Oxfam will use to guide resources, campaigns, programs and fundraising, and how we operate as a confederation."[189] Perhaps reflecting its confederate structure, where the majority of agenda-setting power residing within the affiliates, these plans remain relatively general and aspirational. Illustrating this, the 2013-2019 plan, entitled "The Power of People Against Poverty", advances six policy-related ambitions. The objectives of one of these goals – to take an example – entitled "Saving lives, now and in the future", include having more accountable systems of governance and security; recognition of conflict effects on women by relevant actors; and reducing vulnerabilities in countries with a higher risk of disaster and conflict.[190] Given Oxfam's confederate structure – approximately 20 national offices operate under an overarching management system

[186] The central important of poverty to Oxfam as a brand can be viewed here: https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/about-us/content/new-brand
[187] https://www.oxfam.org/en/what-we-do/about
[188] Oxfam has produced extensive investigations, research and reports, lobbying efforts, campaigns, and projects in these issue areas.
[189] See p. 13: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/story/oxfam-strategic-plan-2013-2019_0.pdf
[190] The strategic plan can be accessed here: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/story/oxfam-strategic-plan-2013-2019_0.pdf

through Oxfam International, though they retain substantial autonomy in practice – it is at the level of the national affiliates that the majority of selection decisions take place. Selecting topics for investigation, generating internal and public-facing output, co-ordinating lobbying efforts, and choosing areas of service delivery, all require acts of selection. To delimit the scope of the analysis, and to ensure geographic consistency across case studies, when examining the ranking generation process behind selection the chapter shall primarily focus on decision-making in influential affiliates such as Oxfam GB and USA.

The empirical evidence in the chapter provides mixed support for the study's theory. As predicted by the theoretical framework, officials recognize that Oxfam face a very significant selection dilemma, exacerbated by an expansion in their mission and issue coverage over time. As the issues within its remit continue to grow, this dilemma is unlikely to diminish. Of the three cases, it is apparent that Oxfam has enacted more systematic mechanisms of learning and evaluation, aiding processes of cross-issue comparison. This is likely a derivation of Oxfam's work on service delivery, where more emphasis is placed on standardizing and hitting performance targets. It may also reflect the professionalization of the INGO over time, wherein insights, strategies, and concepts have been increasingly incorporated from the private sector. Despite this, severe learning problems have arisen, largely driven by dysfunctional information management. The chapter finds that heuristics may help to shape general decision-making. However, it is also apparent that heuristics do not operate or bring about selection outcomes in isolation. The likelihood of policy impact, perceptions of added value, donor preferences, as well issue coverage within the broader INGO network, also seem of causal relevance. Media effects also appear to be more consequential than in the other two cases.

The chapter is structured in the following manner. The first section provides a brief overview of the origin and development of Oxfam, highlighting salient events in its history that contextualize its current work and methods of operation. The second section outlines the INGO's current structure and selection procedures, as well as reflecting on key aspects of its organizational environment. The third part examines the determinants of issue selection and initiates a more detailed evaluation of the

study's theory. The section also explores the (non-)adoption of two issues by Oxfam. These include work on inequalities related to climate justice (positive case) and poverty in Britain (negative case). The chapter concludes with a brief summation of findings.

5.2 Origin and Evolution

Today Oxfam is often recognized as "the world's most influential development organization" (Aaronson and Zimmerman 2006, p. 999). Its journey to this status began during the Second World War, with a meeting in October 1942. Among those present was the renowned midwife and relief organizer Edith Pye, previously active in relief efforts in France during WW1, as well as in China and Spain. Also in attendance at the meeting were two figures from the University of Oxford, Professor Gilbert Murray and the meeting's chair, Rev. R. T. Milford. It was on this occasion, held at the Church of St. Mary-the-Virgin in Oxford, that a small group of individuals – internationalist and humanitarian in outlook – tentatively agreed to found the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief.[191] Within 12 months the committee was officially registered as a charitable organization. Under these auspices, and with the help of other organizations, the committee campaigned to provide critical humanitarian supplies to a Greek population cut off through blockade.[192] Support committees began to spring up around the country, and the committee arranged a relief fund to which the British public could donate. "Greek Week", launched by the Oxford group in 1943, raised and contributed over £10,000 to the Greek Red Cross. This was significant sum for the time – approximately £340,000 today – particularly given the challenges the British public faced by the country's entry into the war.[193]

[191] A plaque adorns a wall of the University Church in Oxford to mark the founding of Oxfam in the Old Library. The plaque lists the date of the meeting (October 5th 1942) and names "Canon: T.R. Milford" as the Chairman.
[192] https://www.oxfam.org/en/our-history#:~:text=The%20name%20%E2%80%9COxfam%E2%80%9D%20comes%20from,during%20the%20Second%20World%20War.
[193]

This work continued for several years during the war, and "while many organizations wound up their efforts at war's end, Oxfam continued its activities" (Ahmed and Potter 2006, p.5).[194] In the post-war years, the identity and form of the group began to take shape. Oxfam became early pioneers in the use of advertising, commonly associated with commercial practice, to bolster its funding streams. In 1946, leading member Cecil Jackson-Cole spent £55 to purchase the maximum amount of permitted advertising space in *The Times* newspaper, achieving a return of £1,200 that helped fund relief work and further advertising. In 1949 Harold Sumption, an expert in advertising, was recruited. This move was to revolutionize the relationship between humanitarianism and visual campaigning. It was Sumption who "…transformed charity advertising in the UK, bringing in striking images of destitution, simple straightforward messages, and clear demands of the public" (Hilton et al. 2013, p. 91). Another area of leadership was the physical presence of charity shops in cities and towns around Britain, opening their first in Oxford in 1948. Although not the first charity to take this approach – the children's charity Barnardos had a shop as early as 1875 – Oxfam has been one of the most adept proponents of this model, attracting a significant portion of its resource through the Oxfam shops, which currently number around 650 in the UK.

The years after the war, and the events of 1951 in particular, were to leave an indelible mark on Oxfam's development. In 1951 the committee responded to the famine in Bihar, India, setting up relief efforts for the region, the first time Oxfam's work was orientated toward a developing country. When famine returned to Bihar in the mid-1960s, Oxfam again mobilized. This work would prove emblematic of the group's evolution and relationship with stricken areas of the developing world. It was also in 1951 that Oxfam appointed Leslie Kirkley as General Secretary, a talismanic figure who occupied the leadership role for 24 years. By any fair assessment Kirkley had, along with figures such as Jackson-Cole, a major impact on the expansion and professionalization of the emerging INGO. Oxfam's own official chronology credits Kirkley with transforming "the organisation from a local charity into a world-renowned aid agency".[195] This view, while it must be taken with the appropriate

[194] Background on the founding of Oxfam is sourced from: Ahmed and Potter 2006.
[195] https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/about-us/history-of-oxfam

disclaimers – it is often difficult to separate fact from mythology in organizational histories – is shared by staff. Prominent human rights campaigner Malcolm Harper, who was part of Oxfam for over two decades and, for a period, worked closely with Kirkley, recalled his influence:

> "In my opinion, in a way, the greatest person in Oxfam's history was Leslie Kirkley. I was young when he employed me and I had a great affection and respect for him as I was his personal assistant for eighteen months, so I got to know him very well. He was in the right sense of the word a superb manipulator. He engendered enormous loyalty amongst the staff" (Rahman 1998).[196]

By the late 1950s there were signs the group was gaining momentum. Strategic mobilizations around events such as World Refugee Year, launched in 1959, saw Oxfam grow in visibility and attract more financing for its aid efforts from both the British public and government. Humanitarian crises such as those in the Congo in 1960 further cemented Oxfam as a notable relief body. It was during this period – the Biafran crisis also occurred later in the decade – that the imagery of starving and skeletal children in Africa entered the public awareness of Britons, forming part of the strategic communications of groups like Oxfam.

> "The tragedy of the Congo burnt the image of the starving African child onto the collective British conscience. Oxfam helped make that come about, and in the process itself leapt into public view as *the* British medium for prompt relief to famine victims in faraway places. When Kirkley went to the Austro-Hungarian border in 1956 he was no-one special…When he went to the Congo in early 1961, he was, fleetingly, a celebrity, on whom British hopes of saving lives were visibly pinned (Black 1992, p. 63).

The strategic adoption of this kind of imagery – typically black, emaciated, and vulnerable children – became a familiar feature of aid agencies aiming to drum up financial support. Advertising had proven to be an effective tool for bringing in large sums of money, which ultimately could be

[196] Harper is quoted in: Rahman, B. 1998. Constructing humanitarianism: An investigation into Oxfam's changing humanitarian culture, 1942-1994. PhD, University of Aberystwyth, Aberystwyth.

distributed to those affected by conflict and starvation. Charitable organizations believed that this imagery was more likely to elicit an affective response among the public, and thus make them more likely to donate. In later years, perspectives on this approach within Oxfam were to change. Paddy Coulter, who later assumed the role of the head of media at Oxfam, evaluated the approach critically. In his 1989 article for the New Internationalist, the sub-heading stated "…no matter how effective the image, the message can be very destructive" (Coulter 1989). Coulter (1989) noted that "several recent studies in the UK show that 'helpless-child' imagery has reinforced patronizing attitudes amongst young people towards the Third World." This was a theme he reprised in a later interview in the context of Biafra and civil war in Nigeria, where Coulter dissected more destructive aspects of the strategy:

> "Some of this stuff was very much 'child in distress', 'human skeleton'…and Jackson-Cole and Sumption certainly have to take responsibility for that…with Biafra you had a situation where the NGOs on the whole got the analysis wrong, as had most of the media. It was presented to the British public as a desperate one-sided race to save children, which was playing into the hands of those wanting a prolongation of the war. This was exacerbated by oversimplified imagery, a colonial mind set, competition between the media…A frame was established for how a relief emergency got covered— but it was the wrong frame."[197]

As with any nascent organization attempting to achieve scale quickly, this episode, and subsequent changes in attitudes towards Oxfam's method of working, suggest an organization in transition. It was a period of building public awareness of the group, but also its early consolidation as the preeminent conduit in Britain for the provision of relief during humanitarian crises. In his analysis of these decades, Rahman (1998) posits a body in the process of constructing an organizational humanitarian culture. Naturally, part of this involved disagreement over the direction Oxfam should take, as well as how and where its focus should be operationalized. One site of debate was how, with

[197] Cooper, G. 2015. NGOs media and public understanding: 25 Years on an interview with Paddy Coulter former head of media at Oxfam. In: G. Cooper & S. Cottle (Eds.), *Humanitarianism, Communications and Change*: 19 (Global Crises and the Media). pp. 79-89. New York, USA: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc

the aim of its alleviation, the INGO should conceive of the structural origins of poverty. Nick Stacey, appointed to the position of Deputy Director in 1968, sought to highlight the co-relation between poverty in the global south and exploitation by the wealthier countries of the north. The implications of this view were at odds with much of Oxfam's practices, which were centred on going directly to the south and providing relief. Moreover, Oxfam was exhibiting growing concern with issues of development, rather than merely emergency response, as this was more likely to contribute to the eradication of poverty in the long-term.

In a sense, the INGO was learning how to negotiate uncertain boundaries in the emerging space of humanitarian politics. This was evidenced by its experience with the Biafra crisis and airlift, after civil war broke out in Nigeria in 1967. Oxfam had argued that a blockade placed on the region was a severe impediment to relief provision, therein questioning its legitimacy. A tension arose between the assertion of Nigerian sovereignty and territorial integrity on one hand, and Oxfam's – as well as other groups – intent on getting much needed aid to a desperate and starving population. This was construed as Oxfam elevating "…its humanitarian concerns over the political and military agenda occurred in an international political context which was not permissive of such claims" (Rahman 1998, p. 99).

Signalling the further evolution of Oxfam, in 1979 a campaigns department was established. This marked a significant shift in the groups modus operandi. As Black (1992, p. 252) points out, "by the mid-1980s, the notion of 'campaigning' had become familiar among Oxfam's local staff and supporter networks". It was also an increasingly international group; though its centre of gravity very much remained in Britain it possessed an expanding overseas staff. Issue uptake began to focus on areas affecting the "Third World", as well as reflecting particular rather than public knowledge. One corollary of having an overseas presence is a better capacity to understand and respond to the experiences of affected populations on the ground. This coincided with the development of specialized expertise within the organization. In conjunction with its more public-facing work Oxfam produced technical reports that were "…directed less at the public than at members of the

professional, governmental and business community who were in a position to a beneficial influence…" (Black 1992, p. 255). It also retained its importance and commitment as a relief organization, the relevance of which was evidenced by the famine which plagued Ethiopia in the mid-1980s, and attracted widespread public attention in Britain and amongst its government. A previous "dichotomy" between development and relief work gradually eased, as Oxfam built up its capacity for disaster response, maintaining a mobile staff that included emergency workers in key issue areas such as water, health, and nutrition (Black 1992, p. 264).

A Rights-Based Approach

Like many INGOs, the period following the Cold War was one of further transition for Oxfam. Major political changes and shifts to Oxfam's organizational environment necessitated a re-assessment of both mission and direction. We may briefly note three key developments for Oxfam in the two decades which followed the end of the Cold War. The first of these changes pertained to organizational structure. In 1995, a number of groups operating independently in different countries coalesced together into a confederation, under the name Oxfam International (Ahmad and Potter 2006, p. 6). In many ways, the beginning of the 1990s was viewed by INGOs as a time for optimism, as international affairs appeared to many to be moving beyond great power politics, with new possibilities for humanitarian action. These came with corresponding challenges that spoke to the limitations of a disaggregated entity. Against this backdrop, the constituent bodies of Oxfam International "… joined together as a confederation to maximize efficiency and achieve greater impact to reduce global poverty and injustice."[198] In practice, these bodies retained much of their own agenda-setting power. Achieving coherence across Oxfam's global reach proved challenging.

A further, major shift was the adoption of a rights-based approach. Through a process of internal debate, the group decided that grounding its work in terms of rights provided a coherent framework

[198] https://www.oxfam.org/en/our-history

for its pursuit. The change, as well as the questions and logic driving it, may be summarized as follows:

> "In the late 1990s, the members of the Oxfam International community undertook a serious reexamination of their development programming, searching for the common philosophical threads that united their development practice. Our goal was to reach deep into our organizational cores and ask what we believed was most important in the way development programs were being conceived and implemented…This process of reflection and planning led us to conclude that the Oxfam approach to development and humanitarian response was fundamentally anchored in a rights-based perspective, with a particular focus on social, economic, and cultural rights."[199]

Prior to this, Oxfam had produced substantial work through its programs and campaigning – including service delivery and lobbying efforts – that closely aligned with a rights-based approach, yet this went unspecified and was not considered holistically as a matter of protecting rights. And yet, despite this alignment, such an approach raised a number of legal, normative, and practical questions for officials (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi 2004). Re-orientating Oxfam in this way forced new thinking in a variety of areas central to its mission, such as the proper role and responsibilities of the state, what issues are within its remit, and how success and impact should be measured (Offenheiser and Holvombe 2003, p. 269). Oxfam's commitment to a rights-based approach rather than one, for instance, centred on basic needs, was complicated by the fact there was no common understanding of the meaning of the framework, either conceptually or in practice among INGOs. It could also be applied in different spheres. In this period, groups such as Amnesty International were beginning to advocate more systematically for social, economic, and cultural rights, while Oxfam GB was "…promoting the human rights approach to development" (Harris-Curtis 2003, p. 559).

[199] Ibid.

A landmark moment in Oxfam's move to a rights-based logic of action was the 2001 publication, by Oxfam International, of "Toward Global Equity: Strategic Plan 2001-2004". The plan outlined Oxfam's intention to not only provide relief for the consequences of poverty and inequality, but to tackle what they saw as the underlying causes of these issues. Signifying the aforementioned challenges of a rights-based approach, "…in the years following the launch of its new strategic plan, Oxfam did not consistently focus on the relationship between poverty, development, human rights, and trade. Nor did it always advocate the rights-based approach it developed and articulated" (Aaronson and Zimmerman 2006, p. 1000). Rather, the INGO retained some of its conventional advocacy and campaigning strategies. Teething problems of this nature were perhaps an inevitability, given the high level of autonomy and complexity that characterizes the confederation.

A third and related development was the expansion of the scope of issues that Oxfam considered within its remit, as is evident from the documentary record. For instance, by 1997 we see the publication of "Gender and Disability: Women's Experiences in the Middle East", written by By Lina Abu-Habib, an Oxfam official active with both the Lebanon office and gender unit. This work highlighted excluded categories of people and experiences from notions and practices of development – in this case disabled women – indicative of the interconnected understanding of issues that was adopted by staff (Abu-Habib 1997). Similarly, Oxfam have continued to publish work and advocate on a number of issue areas that appear – while thematically related to it – somewhat divorced from its initial mission to combat poverty. We can see how the INGO's perception of its mission was gradually broadening in its 2001 publication of a text on the prevention of violence against women. Its authors characterized the relevance of gendered violence to the group's mission as follows:

> "Ending violence against women is one of Oxfam's priorities. It is a central strategy within Oxfam's overall goal of promoting gender equity throughout its international program, and it is central to Oxfam's mandate to relieve poverty and suffering. This prioritisation is the

> fruit of a long…history of Oxfam's support of work to address violence against women…".[200]

It is hard to separate this third development from events in Oxfam's organizational environment. Each of the case studies in this project appear to have been undergoing similar changes, seeing a rapid widening of issue coverage. Indeed, the post-Cold War world seems to have given rise to isomorphic processes in the INGO sector. As Emma Harris-Curtis (2003, p. 559) observes, "…the historical division between human rights organisations and development NGOs is blurring as their interpretations concerning rights and development evolve." The scale and coterminous nature of this transformation suggests the explanatory force of processes beyond the psychological traits of INGO officials, a reminder of the scope conditions of the theory proposed in this study. The theory cannot account for the mechanisms which drove expansion in issue coverage by Oxfam – here we must surely look to structural factors – instead being more suited to account for issue choice once perceptions of an expanded mission were established.

5.3 Oxfam Today

The Oxfam confederation of today is a highly complex entity. It is currently made up of 20 affiliate bodies, each of which operates independently under its International Secretariat. Oxfam's own characterization of the role and power of affiliates are indicative of their high levels of autonomy, particularly the larger affiliates that generate a large portion of the confederations finances: "each affiliate is an independent organization with its own areas of activity and work contributing its own strengths and expertise to the confederation to achieve our shared goals."[201] Outside groups can gain observer status without voting rights – as is currently the case with Oxfam Colombia – with the prospect of becoming a full affiliate. Sitting above these constituent parts is Oxfam International –

[200] Pickup et al. 2001, XI.
[201] https://www.oxfam.org/en/what-we-do/about/how-we-are-organized

Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya – which aims to promote and facilitate coherent action within the confederation, as well as proving leadership and support on all aspects of Oxfam's work, including advocacy, campaigning, and emergency relief. Oxfam International is led by a Board of Supervisors and Executive Board that includes representatives from all affiliates.[202]

In terms of the connection between Oxfam International (OI) and affiliate members, as well how Oxfam operates on a day-to-day level, we may draw a distinction between formal processes and pragmatic realities. One of these realities is where power resides, which one may not glean from an organigram. The relationship between Oxfam International and Oxfam Great Britain (OGB) – the largest and most renowned of the affiliates – is instructive in this regard. The total annual income reported by Oxfam International for the year ending 31st March 2019 was £29 million.[203] In contrast, in the year 2018/2019 OGB accrued headline income of £434 million. Much of this money came from public fundraising and institutional donors. Unspent restricted and unrestricted funds – that is, whether the money must be spent on purposes specified by the donor or not – were £47.7 million and £69 million respectively.[204] While the balance favours unrestricted reserves, these figures highlight two important features of Oxfam: 1) OGB as the largest affiliate has superior resources to the confederal body and 2) a sizable portion of its income is directed by the donor (or the direction of the money is agreed between the donor and Oxfam when the donation is made). When asked about the relationship between OGB and Oxfam International, a Deputy Director in OGB noted the following, without probing:

> "We have [OGB], for all of Oxfam's existence I believe, been the largest financial contributor. We still have, of all the Oxfam affiliates, the largest brand recognition amongst the public…and we have [the highest] proportion of staff. Therefore, historically we have always had a significant mass and power in OI. Even with the conscious shift of power to

[202] Ibid.
[203] https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-05/DocuSigned_OIS_2018-19_Annual_Report_30.04.2020_v2.6.pdf
[204] file:///C:/Users/rossg/Downloads/Annual_Report_2019_FINAL_v3_2.pdf

> OI, we cannot get away from the fact we have been the largest contributor to OI and therefore, invariably, staff with a substantive role in OGB are more likely to end up filling roles or providing capacity for OI on a policy issue or report than other affiliates. So we have both a direct and indirect power and influence over what IO does (Interview ID: V)."[205]

As this response suggests, staff availability, technical competencies, and financial contributions all affect the internal dynamics of the confederation, decoupling organizational practices from formal structure. Rather than Oxfam International being an independent arbiter and force for integration of affiliates, it bears the hallmarks of power discrepancies between affiliates. It was common in interviews for staff to emphasise not only the complexity of the confederation, but also to lament some of its associated dysfunctions, such as a lack of clarity or known asymmetry in where power and responsibility lies. A member of management in a national office in Africa contextualized these challenges in terms of the development of Oxfam over time, comparing the confederation to supranational organizations, where constituent entities end up "jealous of their sovereignty and reluctant to give up decision-making power" (Interview ID: W).[206] A senior policy advisor on the humanitarian side of the INGO, with detailed knowledge of affiliate's dealings with OI, noted a number of related structural issues. They flagged an important separation between the two bodies in terms of management lines on one hand, which is led by OI, and financial and risk compliance on the other, which typically sits with affiliates. Their comments are insightful and worth presenting at length:

> "Oxfam has undergone a series of reforms that have empowered the Oxfam Secretariat and country offices. It used to be the case that affiliates like OGB directly managed country programs. You could have up to five Oxfam country offices in any one country. In 2017, all of the affiliate country programs and regional structures were closed, replaced with OI

[205] Interview ID: V. Deputy Director at OGB.
[206] Interview ID: W. Management in advocacy side of Oxfam. Located in an African office.

> offices and platforms, and the management lines shifted to OI…Except, affiliates still control the money. OI still does not have the capacity for back-up house services that countries need. So OGB basically runs IT and services for the entire confederation. But most importantly, affiliates hold the liability for donor programming. They sign the contract, have legal liability, and have therefore maintained compliance oversight over what countries do. And there's the creation of an architecture – not fit for purpose – that is meant to mediate the fact management lines sit with OI but financial and risk compliance is managed by affiliates. It is mainly the same three or four affiliates who do this. This is something that we are trying to move away from" (Interview ID: X).[207]

These remarks reveal several issues with Oxfam's internal dynamics. As the policy advisor notes, it was once the case that several affiliates could operate independently within the same country, a severe problem in terms of co-ordination and optimization of resources. Serious efforts appear to have been made to promote integration and coherence within the confederation, by shifting to a more unified structure under OI. And yet, material constraints in terms of financial inputs and resources, as well as disjuncture between management lines and financial operations, has meant that some affiliates retain substantial influence in the direction and management of the organization. The formal structure, designed to address particular organizational inefficiencies, has thus far yet to fully actuate and – despite undoubted progress in aiding coherent action – new challenges have arisen.

Another critical aspect of Oxfam's mode of operation is the emphasis placed on monitoring and evaluation. In fact, this area was more sophisticated in Oxfam than in the other case studies. Considerable resources, including staff appointments, the development of technical expertise, and outlays of time and finances, are expended by Oxfam on the production of high-quality reports. It is a common view among staff that the impact reports – the form they take may depend on the area of work – are generally well done. Of course, there are different levels of reportage, with impact evaluation and monitoring in the field being particularly demanding. However, there is also

[207] Senior Policy Advisor on humanitarian side of INGO.

consensus that these activities are undermined by issues of information management, where the decentralized and complex character of the organization mitigates against getting the right information in to the right hands when needed:

> "We produce amazing impact evaluations of some of our most important contexts and programs. But it is very easy not to know they exist. We are a very large organization that produces a lot of documents. We have an information management problem that becomes a learning problem…we just do not invest in the systems and processes to make sure information is adequately disseminated…These reports are all published online. It is actually easier to find things – as a member of Oxfam staff – through Google than it is through any of our internal systems…[And] it is not always apparent who needs to have access to certain learning to make sure that learning is effectively disseminated to everyone who needs to have it. It is definitely possible to start working on something, only to discover other affiliates, a country office, a regional platform, there are other people who are working independently on the same thing that you're working on" (Interview ID: X).[208]

The spectrum of issues that Oxfam work on today has also continued to grow. Among these issues, we may observe what appears to be a convergence between the issues Oxfam has taken on and wider trends among human rights and humanitarian INGOs. This trend has coincided with a shift in the centre of gravity of the organization – increasingly moving from North to South – and perceptions of the role of staff. A new structure is in the process of implementation whereby a researcher active in one issue area, for instance, may be expected to move quickly to work on another issue area, while retaining certain specialist expertise. The issues that Oxfam currently prioritizes, and which must fit within this new model, may be categorized under headings such as: food, water, health and education, women's rights, businesses and poverty, conflicts and disasters, and climate change. Oxfam's work

[208] This staff member has extensive experience with impact evaluation and internal structures, including the problems sited here. However, they expressed frustration that the precise solutions remain elusive.

on another issue area, categorized as citizens' rights, exemplifies the convergence occurring in the INGO sector. This work has included helping with access to information, legal rights, and the right to freedom of expression and to demonstrate.[209] Empowerment of marginalized groups, including protection of their civil and political rights – while certainly connected to poverty reduction – has traditionally been viewed as more within the purview of groups like Amnesty and HRW. The expansion of Oxfam's remit not only suggests thematic convergence, possibly related to its adoption of its rights-based framework, but is also likely to exacerbate questions of prioritization.

In addition to the general political context Oxfam must now negotiate – the rise of right-wing nationalism has been discussed in the preceding case studies – we may briefly comment on two events which inform the INGO's current operational environment, and that particularly affect its most prominent affiliate, OGB. The first is the impact of the Haiti scandal. This refers to claims that Oxfam staff, including country director Roland van Hauwermeiren, exploited victims of the 2010 earthquake by hiring young prostitutes, as well as making attempts to cover up this wrongdoing. When reports emerged in 2018 of the behaviour of staff in Haiti the consequences for Oxfam's reputation were vast. The UK Charity Commission reported that Haiti was not a one-off incident, but part of wider patterns of failure on safeguarding through the INGO.[210] A spokesperson for the UK Prime Minister described the behaviour of staff as "truly shocking".[211] Thousands of regular Oxfam donors, as well as high-profile ambassadors such as Desmond Tutu, were lost in light of the scandal. Resulting financial turmoil meant the group had to make major cuts to jobs and relief programs. A second and related issue is that the UK has decided to merge the Department for International Development (DfID) – which provided significant funding to Oxfam prior to the Haiti scandal – with the Foreign Office (FCO). Although relations between DfiD and Oxfam were certainly strained in recent years, DfiD has been "one of Oxfam's most strategically important

[209] For further information and a succinct overview of this work, see here: https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/issues-we-work-on/holding-people-in-power-to-account
[210] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48593401
[211] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/09/oxfam-pressed-over-claims-haiti-aid-workers-used-prostitutes

partners", and its merger with the FCO may prove deleterious to the group's recovery in the medium term.[212]

5.4 The Determinants of Issue Selection in Oxfam

Based on the study's theory, as well as initial empirical investigations, Oxfam was classified as a hard case for the proposed theory. The rational for this was straightforward. In comparison to human rights INGOs such as Amnesty and HRW, whose remit is expressly broad, Oxfam's mission has been more narrowly focused on the reduction and eradication of poverty. The order of complexity in comparing and choosing issue options would therefore seem of a lesser degree. Somewhat counter-intuitively, however, the evidence suggests selection decisions are a major and persistent challenge for Oxfam officials. Rather, staff suggested that not only was selection a salient problem for them – perhaps *the main challenge they face* – but that it may in fact pose a *greater* challenge for them than for large human rights INGOs. A deputy director involved in deliberations on selection, and with prior experience in the human rights sector, outlined the logic:

> "Poverty, even compared to something like human rights, is such a broad issue into which anything could be factored. It is a challenge. I started by career with Amnesty UK. Thankfully, you have conventions on human rights that list those sorts of human rights which you might work or campaign on, and it is a choice between them. You know what the parameters are. There is a clearly understood template and list of agreed issues on which you might campaign. Whereas poverty doesn't have this definition. All factors in our lives affect our likelihood of being at risk of poverty and our experience of poverty. Therefore, lots of cases can be made about what work we should prioritise as it contributes to an aspect of poverty" (Interview ID: V).[213]

[212] https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-approach/strategic-funding-partnerships/dfid-program-partnership-agreement
[213] Interview ID: V. Deputy Director in OGB.

This perspective was corroborated by another experienced member of management, who stated that in their eight years of service at Oxfam, "the most frequent question I heard in these years has been how can we prioritize better" (Interview ID: X).[214] Further signalling the importance of selection, at the time of writing Oxfam is undergoing a major process of deliberation on various aspects of this debate. This includes what areas the group should focus on, what they have been successful at doing, and what are the barriers to achieving impact. Speaking to members of staff informally, it appears there is consensus on the need to narrow the focus of the organization, to "do less and do it better." As part of this upheaval, Oxfam is currently making decisions on withdrawing their presence from certain countries, with the aim of implementing a more streamlined approach where the issue agenda is reduced and simplified. This is likely to exacerbate selection challenges as the future of existing programs comes under scrutiny.

Considering this challenge, what factors determine issue selection? One point of difference between Oxfam and the former two cases is the role of donors. Depending on the affiliate or country, Oxfam procures financing to support its work from a variety of sources. In Oxfam USA, to give an example, statements for the financial year April 2018-March 2019 reveal annual revenue of $90 million, and net assets at the years end of $70 million. In that year, its top donors – those who contributed over $1 million – included bodies such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Open Society Foundations, Oxfam Italy, and United Nations Development Program. A large portion of its funding – estimated at 50% by an official familiar with its financing – comes from philanthropic organizations, though income streams also include other Oxfam affiliates, the UN, country MFAs, and a host of individual contributors. Notably absent from Oxfam USA's contributors is the US government – the affiliate refuses such funding, though this position is regularly re-assessed. Yet other affiliates, such as Oxfam GB, have long received funding

[214] Senior policy advisor at Oxfam.

from the UK government, with the UK Department for International Development (DFID) described as "one of Oxfam's most strategically important partners."[215]

Donors appear to play a comparatively important role in Oxfam's work. This is likely, in part, a derivation of the mode of operation in Oxfam, which includes a significant arm for service delivery and emergency relief in developing countries. Indeed, the extent to which donors matter for decision-making seems contingent on the operational branch of the INGO, a fact which appears to shape how officials in different areas interpret their effects on selection.

Illustrating this divergence, a member of management overseeing Oxfam activities in an African state, as well as being part of the INGO's West Africa platform, regarded the influence of donors as highly influential in shaping their agenda:

> "The priority is set by the donors. You can have a bunch of donors, the European Union, Germans, Americans, Swedes, Irish, it is basically a call for proposals. And often I see Oxfam, at least with our humanitarian work, as us just being the implementation arm of the major donors. For example, the EU may have a call for proposals, saying 'we have money for X', who wants in? And then it is just a bidding process. In this sense, the decision is taken outside of Oxfam. It is the donor saying: 'this is how we want to spend our money'. There are obviously some ways to influence the donor. If you can come up with hard data or analyses, or bring [to them] an original idea, they will often go along with it. But the framework of how and where they want the money to be spent, that is already set" (Interview ID: W).[216]

The above perspective dovetails with the financial records showing a sizeable segment of Oxfam funding is restricted. Conversely, a senior management figure in Oxfam GB conveyed an altogether different view, casting doubt on the extent to which donors influenced selection: "In my time with

[215] See: https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-approach/strategic-funding-partnerships/dfid-program-partnership-agreement. In recent years, on the back of the Oxfam scandal in Haiti, this partnership has been severed.
[216] Interview ID: W. Member of management involved in advocacy. Based in Africa as part of the West Africa platform.

Oxfam I have not seen a challenge where donor funding is influencing our decisions, either directly or indirectly" (Interview ID: V). The official noted that, for Oxfam GB, perhaps the most important area of concern is individual supporter fundraising. And while the INGO has a coterie of political engaged supporters, many of these individuals do not give much money. The more apolitical supporters, such as people who buy in Oxfam shops and give small, regular donations, tend to do so for quite general moral reasons. Consequently, these donors have little impact on Oxfam's priorities, as they are not necessarily engaged with the nuts and bolts of the group's activities. Furthermore, staff in a number of affiliate bodies noted that the INGO has, and will continue to, reject offers of financing if they believe the actions of a donor, or the purpose of the money, does not fit with their ethos. Oxfam has an ethical check, as well as conducting assessments as to whether the donation fits with its rights-based approach, before accepting money from a prospective donor.

Staff in different parts of Oxfam therefore offer a quite distinct portrait of their relationship with donors. Donors appear to wield significant agenda-setting power when it comes to service delivery in the developing world, when INGOs enter a tendering process and essentially bid for financial support. Although Oxfam may then engage with the donor to shape the money in the direction the INGO prefers, often the fundamental parameters of how the funding will be used is set in advance. At the very least, this restricts the degrees of freedom Oxfam officials have to act. However, when it comes to operations such as advocacy, campaigns, or communications, the views of staff are markedly different. In those instances, the influence of donors appears negligible. In terms of drawing inferences, we know that INGOs may have incentives for underestimating their relationship with donors. However, because staff were candid about the effects of donors in service delivery, we may interpret claims as to their impact in other areas as broadly reliable.

Recurring factors in issue selection, both in the documentary record and in interviews with staff, were a desire for policy impact and whether or not Oxfam could contribute value. In relation to impact, one point of consensus of the internal review – which the INGO was engaged in at the time of research – seems to be a scaling back in the number of issue areas Oxfam would tackle, as well as

how many countries they were present in. A central motivation for this move was that, by "doing less, better", the group would optimize its impact. Discussions surrounded whether long-term strategic plans remained fit for purpose. One manager in Oxfam GB, who is involved in the review, offered the following interpretation, without probing:

> "We place a lot of value on long-term systemic change, which is valid and part of our history of tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. But increasingly, in a world like the one we are in now, where we are seeing rapid changes, that long-term approach can come at direct costs to immediate policy advocacy that can affect people now (Interview ID: V).

There is thus a sense in the INGO that it needs to be more reactive, and that the 3-5 year strategic plans which have guided its work heretofore may be increasingly incongruous which a rapidly shifting political environment. Events in US politics, as well as the emergence of Covid-19, appear to have convinced many staff members of the need for a more agile organization, one that is responsive to unforeseen developments. Dissenting somewhat against this recent push, a senior figure who oversees much of Oxfam's research, argued that moving too much on the side of agility could, in fact, undermine efforts for impact:

> "We need to get to short-term impact without sacrificing long-term development…We all recognize than an organization has to be pretty agile. But as a researcher I also know that there is a limit to how agile [you should be]. Issues have a longer shelf life than six months. You can't resolve anything or have radical impact in that time. I have been trying to encourage the organization to commit to an issue…to have impact you need to have the evidence base, the networks, the advocacy connections, the public behind you. You can't flip-flop on issues. You need to commit for a certain period of time" (Interview ID: Z).[217]

[217] Interview ID: Z. Senior member of management in an affiliate who oversees research.

Despite these divergent perspectives, connecting them is a collective commitment to the importance of impact. The aim of impact was raised without probing in almost all interviews with officials. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the prominence of this factor in the documentary record. In training materials, for example, as well as guiding documents for group think-ins, impact is a prominent criterion for selection.[218] As the interviews suggest, this factor is not only reflected in organizational material but seems to be prominent in the minds of staff involved in selection choices. However, not all staff members believed that Oxfam's dedication to impact manifested in either its general mode of working or selection choices. A management figure involved in advocacy, without probing, expressed frustration that, due to the complex layers of bureaucracy issue choices may go through, the end result is commonly a multi-faceted goal that is too general to be actionable. Moreover, strategic policies may be well-constructed, but fail to be matched by reliable data, specific allocations of resources, or staff competencies. The official also lamented Oxfam's tendency to favour internal consensus over impact. They recalled an instance when, confronted with a choice between a development or humanitarian project in a West African country, the INGO ultimately decided to do both so as to ensure inclusivity. This stretched resources and undermined the prospect of impact: "when confronted with a choice, they choose both. This can paralyse the organization and waste resources" (Interview ID: W). Impact may be a pressing concern for INGO officials, but its practical implementation is not without problems.

Oxfam also reflects on how they fit among the broader network of INGOs active in an issue area. A staff member on the humanitarian side of the group put it simply: "we talk a lot about out added value" (Interview ID: X). If an issue area is well covered already, Oxfam appears less likely to initiative action on it. The official cited the Syrian civil war in 2011 as an example. When the crisis there first emerged, it received significant international attention, including from other INGOs. In cases like this this, Oxfam may decide to concentrate its efforts elsewhere, as it did with Syria – albeit Oxfam subsequently engaged with the country when the scale of the crisis grew over time. These

[218] Internal materials shared with the researcher.

sentiments were echoed by a leading campaigner in Oxfam GB. They posited that the INGO will discuss where and when the brand of Oxfam may be useful. They will liaise with local networks in affected countries to assess what value they could add, trying not to go over the heads of those already active on the issue (Interview ID: A1).[219] Whether or not Oxfam officials believe they can add value to an issue – a calculation germane to impact – therefore appears to be a driver o selection.

Although it was broached less often in the interviews, another prospective factor in selection – common to each of the case studies – seems to be shifts in the operational environment. An example of this is the INGO's pivot towards issues surrounding right-wing populism. After the 2016 election of US President Donald Trump, the UK Brexit vote, and other perceived instances of the rise of nationalist sentiment, Oxfam decided to conduct research into the origins and nature of this trend. A senior official on the policy side of Oxfam USA explained the rationale underpinning this move. According to the official, the election of right-wing populists meant that access to, and opportunities to influence, government officials in partner governments had dried up. Traditional methods of working were suddenly redundant, as Oxfam found itself marginalized from centres of power. Consequently, their attention turned to right-wing nationalism itself, and how it was having a deleterious impact on Oxfam's capacity for policy change (Interview ID: Y).[220] The report summarized these developments:

> "Recent political events in Europe and North America have posed a problem for organisations like Oxfam whose mission is to eradicate global poverty and injustice. The rise of right-wing populism has challenged the internationalism underlying that mission and threatened aid budgets. It has also undermined other components of the development consensus, including humanitarian help to refugees, the struggle for gender justice and the fight against climate change."[221]

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[219] Interview ID: A1. Lead humanitarian campaigner in Oxfam GB.
[220] Interview ID: Y. Senior Policy Advisor at Oxfam USA.
[221] https://views-voices.oxfam.org.uk/2018/01/what-does-populism-mean-for-ngo-policy-and-practice/. To view the full report, see: Galasso, V. Nicholas; Feroci, Gianandrea Nelli; Pfeifer, Kimberly; Walsh, Martin "The Rise of Populism

The same official explained that it was these events that led to a rise in salience of civil and political rights among Oxfam staff, issue areas more commonly associated with human rights groups. The political shift toward right-wing nationalism appears to have had a discernible effect on its agenda. Moreover, changes to selection patterns is not confined to political shifts. Having endeavoured to narrow its pool of issues, a leading researcher noted that Oxfam responded to the spread of Covid-19 by widening it once more, on the basis that new opportunities arose for impact in a host of areas, such as poverty and debt (Interview ID: Z). Another example is Oxfam's decision to focus its limited resources on particular country cases, such as moving its attention between the crises in Yemen and Syria. As events changed in these cases, so too did Oxfam's response, reacting to (de-)escalation in scale and opportunities to add value (Interview ID: A1).

When asked about the relationship between the media and issue choices, there was a general consensus among interview participants that the former does affect the latter. "It would be naïve not to think it has an effect" an official in Oxfam GB remarked, "but it is also an indicator of appeal to important actors, such as stakeholders and supporters. If an issue is prominent in the media it may mean we have to fight less to get agreement on it…the media plays an agenda-setting function no matter who you are" (Interview ID: X). Another senior figure involved in humanitarian work, when asked directly whether the media affected decision-making, put it candidly: "Yes they do. They can sway us. If an issue is covered in the media we can leverage more capacity from colleagues…We already have the policy line, so it sways us to a certain extent" (Interview ID: A1). The documentary evidence corroborates these responses, albeit suggesting the causal direction of this relationship works both ways. On the one hand, we can point to Oxfam's recent appointment of a lead on racial justice – a decision taken in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd in the US – as exemplifying the way in which high media attention can have a substantive effect on selection. On the other, we

and its Implications for Development NGOs," Oxfam Research Backgrounder series (2017): www.oxfamamerica.org/riseofpopulism.

can highlight how Oxfam works on issues which attract little coverage – the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is one such case – and attempt to generate more attention in the media.

This latter logic – taking a proactive approach rather than reacting to external forces – appears especially relevant when it comes to public opinion. As one official put it:

> "We wouldn't not do an issue because there was no public interest. With most of the issues we work on, there is not necessarily high public awareness. And in cases where there is high awareness, such as Syria, we didn't campaign on it for five years despite this. Public opinion plays a part [in our work] but I see it more as influencing our tactics and messaging" (Interview ID: A1).

Of primacy to Oxfam's theory of change is sticking with issues for the long haul. The group will tend not to oscillate on the basis of public opinion. One example of this is the consistency of Oxfam's work on Palestine, which has persisted despite marked changes in levels of public awareness over time. In terms of campaigning, increasing public awareness is a core dimension of campaigning strategy. It is also viewed as a means of recruiting support and procuring funds. Illustrating this, an internal Oxfam USA strategy communiqué categorizes a "public engagement win" as a criterion for a campaign receiving cross-team support within the organization. This is defined as a "measurable increase in brand awareness, supporter numbers or engagement, donations and restricted (e.g. foundation) opportunities."[222] We may therefore conclude that while media has a discernible impact on Oxfam's agenda, levels of awareness among the public is less determinate. Rather, the INGO is content to generate public awareness on issues which are chosen prior, and to use campaigning as an avenue to advance the organization's brand.

[222] Internal document shared with researcher.

Heuristics and Issue Selection

To understand whether cognitive heuristics affect issue outcomes or not in Oxfam we must first have some familiarity with the decision-making process. The theory advanced in this study not only posits the effects of heuristics, but also situates key decision-makers as integral to the process of selection. At first glance, Oxfam appears to be a difficult test for this aspect of the theory given the complexity of its confederation – the size and complexity of the INGO was cited, without probing, by several interview participants who viewed it as a crucial feature of the group. The layers of bureaucracy, as well as presence of formal and informal veto points in the selection process, were similarly raised by staff. Despite this, it was evident from conversations with officials in different parts of the organization – both geographically and in terms of substantive work – that individuals wield significant power in choosing issues.

One longstanding member of Oxfam GB opined – with some cynicism – that "the system is designed to make people feel like they have no power", reflecting a widespread perception among staff that the decision-making process lacked transparency or accountability (Interview ID: X). Another official directly involved in issue planning elaborated on this perspective, and the influence of individuals at the top of the organization:

> "Within Oxfam there are individuals, like any large organization, that have particular sway. A lot of people feel decision-making is not transparent, because something [a proposal] can go off into the ether and come back in a slightly different way. And they feel that is a sign that individuals within leadership positions have undue influence. They have power over decision-making that isn't particularly transparent" (Interview ID: V).

An official in a different geographical region, who has worked for several different INGOs, agreed with this assessment, "de facto there is a clique of Oxfam old boys and girls, the veterans, who still run the show. Though they are less powerful than in the past" (Interview ID: W). In this vein, a senior policy advisor in Oxfam USA noted that voting meetings were increasingly common, with the

aim of mitigating risks associated with elevating the preferences of individual personalities, but lamented that "the reality is it will always play a role" (Interview ID: Y). Conversely, it must be acknowledged that not all experiences with issue selection are negative, or suffer from a lack of transparency. A recent internal canvass of issue proposals, which went across teams and sought out new ideas from staff, appears to have been met warmly. In general, however, although staff emphasized that Oxfam was – as one official put it – "a remarkably complicated organization", there was broad consensus that a coterie of individuals, mostly people who have been with the INGO for decades, wield considerable say in formulating its agenda.

Of course, it is not axiomatic that we can connect the influence of individuals to the psychological traits of these figures, nor that heuristics specifically determine patterns of issue uptake. How does the empirical evidence match against the theorized heuristics? Beginning with the availability heuristic, which suggests that issues are more likely to be selected if they involve instances of vivid suffering, the data appears to show mixed evidence that that decision-makers are particularly concerned with vivid abuses of human rights, especially those associated with attacks on the physical integrity of victims.

Regarding affirmative evidence for the effects of availability, a number of officials highlighted the importance of safeguarding human rights defenders in their work. An example of this is, in 2016, the publication of a report entitled *El Riesgo de Defender*. In the report, Oxfam noted that "murders, attacks, and acts of repression against human rights activists in Latin America has reached historic levels". [223] Oxfam's Regional Deputy Director in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asier Hernando, suggested that Latin America "…has fallen into an unthinkable spiral of violence, and this must stop. Too many lives have been lost, and harassment against human rights defenders continues with impunity."[224] Although Oxfam's mission specifically focuses on poverty, it is instructive how issues involving physical violence are at the forefront of their concerns. Of course, the protection of human

[223] https://www.oxfam.org/fr/node/10600
[224] Ibid.

rights defenders is not incongruent with the mission – a strong civil society may well be instrumental to reducing levels of poverty – but it is not a foregone conclusion that the issue would be selected among a plethora of options. Furthermore, in interviews several officials identified Oxfam's work and statements as being contingent on the physical safety of their own staff and rights defenders in affected countries. If a press release or project had the potential to cause harm, such as by provoking a repressive regime into action against civil society, decision-makers may calculate that it is not worth the risk and choose not to call attention to an issue. In general, informal judgments of severity also weigh into selection choices, a calculation for which violence is relevant (Interview IDs: Y and A1). Vivid forms of suffering, in particular the threat of violence, seem at the forefront of the minds of decision-makers.

By contrast, we may also identify examples where Oxfam overlook cases of vivid and violent suffering to focus their attention elsewhere. As discussed above, despite the extreme violence and abuses of physical integrity rights that characterized the civil war in Syria, Oxfam chose not to prioritize that conflict – they later reversed this decision as the scale of the situation worsened. How might we explain these apparently contradictory attitudes, where threats to human rights defenders may result in considerable investigation and attention, while one of the world's most brutal civil wars is passed over? The answer appears to reside in INGO networks, comparative issues coverage, and staff perceptions as to where Oxfam can add the most value. If an issue is already covered by a host of competent actors – as Syria appeared to be in the earlier years of the civil war – officials felt there would be diminished returns by adding the Oxfam brand to the cause. The issue of human rights defenders in Latin America, on the other hand, was much less covered, perhaps indicating that adding Oxfam's voice to the problem may well have a demonstrable impact on the probability of policy change. We may therefore consider these factors, issue coverage by the INGO network, a desire for impact, and assessments of added value, as potential drivers of decision-making that, depending on the set of issues under examination, may increase or decrease the likelihood of selection, even in cases of extreme violence.

Turning to the representative heuristic, the evidence appears less ambiguous. It seems quite clear that analogous reasoning and reflection plays a role in issue selection, and the conditions surrounding the decision-making process – characterized by influential individuals, time pressures, and the inaccessibility of reliable information – are aligned with what one would anticipate for heuristics to affect policy judgments. Oxfam's advocacy in favour of an arms trade treaty is an instructive example. Since 2003, the organization worked in support of a treaty "that would regulate the international trade in conventional weapons."[225] In conjunction with Amnesty International, and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), Oxfam helped launch a campaign "calling for effective arms controls to make people genuinely safer from the threat of armed violence."[226] In addition to campaigning, the INGO produced discussion papers and research detailing the detrimental effects of an unregulated arms trade on the diffusion of violence and ill-treatment of marginalized communities. Almost a decade later, in advance of negotiations on the treaty at the United Nations, the group published a number of briefing papers outlining the issues and stakes as they saw them. After undergoing multiple failures, including at the 2012 UN Conference in New York, the treaty eventually entered into force in 2014.[227]

An official who overseas monitoring and evaluation on the humanitarian side of the INGO noted that Oxfam's involvement in the push for the arms trade treaty was a touchstone experience for its officials. Irrespective of the substantive domain, references and analogies were drawn to this experience, providing staff with a key example of the need for persistence over time to bring about change at the international level:

> "When we are setting the priorities and looking at developing our strategy, we look back at where the most successful humanitarian campaigning was done, what the elements of that were, and we do have that sort of thing recorded…we also use that as reasoning for why we

[225] https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-abc-of-the-arms-trade-treaty-why-its-important-how-will-it-work-230398
[226] https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/shattered-lives-the-case-for-tough-international-arms-control-112366
[227] https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CN/2014/CN.630.2014-Eng.pdf

> should keep priorities for longer. One that is quite a favourite to go back to is the arms trade treaty, which was at least a ten-year process. It moved up and down in terms of how public it was, there was lobbying and advocacy going on throughout those ten years. So that is a good one for us to go back to and learn from…we saw that as a key success" (Interview ID: A1).

The use of a singular, prominent example such as the arms trade treaty to inform decision-making on campaigns across a host of humanitarian issues, is consistent with the operation of the representative heuristics. Classifying issue options within the context of the arms treaty – a particular thematic area which saw success under specific conditions – and drawing analogies between them may serve to neglect important contextual variables. Oxfam, as with many other INGOs, have worked on many issues over a period of years without seeing success. Amnesty International's campaigning on the death penalty in the US is perhaps one of the most notorious examples. Therefore, inferring that distinct issues should not be dropped from the issue agenda on the basis that it took ten years before the arms trade treaty entered into force may bias judgments on the probability of success. Given the official referred to the treaty as a "favourite" example to return to, it suggests that analogous reasoning about contemporary issues is commonly indexed against this case, a further indication of representativeness.

Another senior official, active on questions of selection in Oxfam GB, posited the importance of learning through analogies. They suggested that a group of "key people" who hold sway in selection decisions, and have been part of Oxfam for many years, use historical analogies to add weight to their preferred choices: "we have key people making those [selection] decisions who have been there a while. They refer to things in the past [successes and failures]…that type of argument is convincing for members of the teams" (Interview ID: V). There are three elements to this response which conform to the expectations of the theory. The informant noted, without probing, that it was a small group of important officials that influence issue outcomes. They further identified analogous reasoning as a central component of the discussions which surround selection. And they concluded

that it was precisely such reasoning strategies which were effective in convincing members of the wider teams to get on board with their preferences, indicating that appeals to representativeness were a determining factor. Of course, on the basis of these comments alone we cannot rule out all alternative explanations. It is possible that experienced officials know that, when formulating their arguments, cross-case comparison to historical examples is an effective means to garner support for their choices, and that analogies serve an instrumental purpose. When making inferences we must recognize a potential distinction between behaviour that aligns with the theoretical postulates, and the underlying motivational logic which is actually driving that behaviour.

This said, there is further evidence that representativeness may be at play. An expert on impact and evaluation in Oxfam USA, who is involved in debates over – and the choosing of – criteria for selection, conceded that the empirical justifications for advocacy and campaign work had deteriorated in recent years. The official described a number of settings where Oxfam teams would come together, have an in-depth planning discussion of the context of an issue, and reflect on a set of prepared questions to aid learning. Although "the past is a huge factor" in these meetings, the informant lamented that "research-backed campaigning is not as strong as it once was. I would be less comfortable now if I was on the front line" (Interview ID: Y). While learning conversations were happening, how systematic and reliable these lessons were is more questionable. This perspective was corroborated by staff in Oxfam GB. As noted above, the affiliate expends considerable resources and expertise on the development of quality reports on its work. Despite this, it is often the case that staff who would benefit from these reports are unaware of their existence. Problems of information management bleed into issues of learning and selection – officials are forced to make haphazard choices without the benefit of reliable data. Taken together, the evidence is in broad accordance with the observable implications of the representative heuristic.

We may acknowledge a caveat: that geographically widespread within the confederation, learning problems may be more or less salient depending on the area of work and time horizons between projects. For instance, an informant familiar with Oxfam campaigns and service delivery in

developing countries identified systematic markers for monitoring and evaluation. If a project is initiated for 12 months, there is usually a "light-touch" review in the first and third quarters, as well as a more comprehensive check at the six months mark. Learning within projects is therefore quite sophisticated. To the extent that the same actors are involved in future projects, or the gap between thematically or geographically related work is weeks or months rather than years, the information management problem is likely to be mitigated. Acknowledging such incidences, the overall evidence appears to fit quite well with use of the representative heuristic.

Similarly, the empirical research seems to suggest the plausibility of the affect heuristic influencing decision-making. We have already established that the preferences of individuals can refine and shape selection outcomes at Oxfam. How might the affective response of staff to issue options drive variation in uptake? Consider the INGO's work examining the negative practices of major pharmaceutical companies, particularly those originating in North America. In 2018, the group published a research paper entitled "Harmful Side Effects: How drug companies undermine global health." The report suggested that "four pharmaceutical companies – Abbott, Johnson & Johnson, Merck and Pfizer – systematically hide their profits in overseas tax havens", an activity that "could deprive developing countries of $112m (around £88m) every year – money that is urgently needed to meet the health needs of people in these countries – while charging very high prices for their products."[228] This built on a longstanding critique by the INGO of drugs companies, patent rules, and restrictions in access to crucial medicines in the developing world.[229]

The decision to focus on harm caused by the pharmaceutical industry is instructive for testing the theory because it appears to contravene the logics of selection proffered by Oxfam officials, both by informants and in documentary material. Given the size and influence of the companies under analysis, there was very little prospect of substantive impact (a fact known to staff). In the US, the pharmaceutical industry is one of the most powerful political lobbies, is directly involved in political

[228] https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620547/bn-harmful-side-effects-pharma-180918-en.pdf;jsessionid=AFB74E8CE6854D9F752D6CEF6A748606?sequence=1
[229] See: http://irpublicpolicy.ir/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2FC2AA288F35989A817421B0D1D20362.pdf#page=253

campaigns – spending hundreds of millions at the state and federal levels – and, as a consequence, wields tremendous influence on Capitol Hill.[230] Moreover, as there are several organizations committed to monitoring and assessing the activities of drug companies, and the substantive area is somewhat indirectly linked to Oxfam's core mission of poverty reduction, the added value of their brand may have been better served in another issue area. A senior official in Oxfam USA elaborated on the rationale behind selecting this issue: "Our campaign on the pharmaceutical industry – which is one of the most powerful lobbies in the United States – got prioritized because individuals who were involved in the research were driving it. [We knew] it wouldn't make much of a difference, and it did not meet any of our metrics for selection, such as getting a policy win" (Interview ID: Y). It appears that the issue was chosen because a small number of individuals were personally invested in it, which was enough to get it over the line, despite it failing to meet much of the criteria identified in interviews and internal documents.

That this sort of personal investment is related to affective response appears plausible, given the typical characteristics of an Oxfam staff member. These features include strong ethical commitments, a sense of justice, and attachment to issues of personal and professional salience. A member of management in Oxfam GB described their colleagues as follows, without probing:

> "Most, or a lot of, people who work in Oxfam are ideologically and cause driven. A lot of that bears out in… almost all of us work too much. It also means the stakes are very high for us in [internal] strategic negotiations. It feels like their life's work is up for grabs. There is also a subset of the organization who are more bureaucratic, such as generic program managers. They are more adaptive…they don't have a particular stake in what we work on under the broader mandate of rights and poverty reduction. Whereas I think for others, whose role in the organization is much more about what they work on, it can be much

[230] See: shorturl.at/dghAF

> harder to navigate changes. It is an organization of activists and bureaucrats" (Interview ID: X).

This perspective was shared by another management figure who is active in the humanitarian and campaigning part of Oxfam GB. The official noted that while everyone who signs up to work for Oxfam typically shares a broad set of values, such as conviction that global poverty must be overcome, there are vocal individuals – the "activists" as it is put above – who passionately push the case for their favoured issues. It is the internal lobbying by such individuals that can sway fellow team members and convince those involved in media production and other public facing output to prioritize some issues over others (Interview ID: A1).

The evidence therefore suggests that those within Oxfam who are most concerned with the selection process, who feel they have most at stake, are driven by deeply personal commitments – to specific causes informed by ideological reference frames – at the level of the individual. While the "bureaucrats" – albeit part of a simplified paired archetype – are more aligned to the general ethos of Oxfam and invest little in specific causes, those who are motivated by particular causes tend to display a significant attachment to them during the selection process. Further, the passionate convictions of individual members can stand them in good stead for determining priorities because, by virtue of their expertise and ability to articulate the necessity of working on their issue, they are well-positioned to take advantage of opportunities that arise:

> "With some people, the willingness to keep plugging away at what your passion area is when no-one is paying attention. Even when you've been told it is not the organizational priority. That it's not going to make a difference. That we're not working on that anymore and you should focus on this other thing. The people who stay with it, plug away, maintain their network, and do it on the side because it's what they care about most in the world, are often very well positioned because strategies ebb and flow and moments present themselves for that type of expertise" (Interview ID: X).

We can see how this selection dynamic plays out in practice with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Approximately five years ago, Oxfam made the decision to focus its attention on three core areas: women, water, and work. Despite its downgrading, a staff member who focuses on health policy endeavoured to continue their work in that area. The health policy advisor effectively retained organizational competencies on health issues, allowing the INGO to respond positively when the Covid-19 crisis arose, "when Covid struck, she is now the most important and powerful voice within the organization in our Covid response" (Interview ID: X). This is an especially important role, as essentially all of Oxfam's work is in some way indexed against what is happening with Covid-19. As this episode illustrates, the determination of an individual official to push forward on an issue that had lost salience across the organization ultimately had a considerable bearing on Oxfam's activities, and put that figure at the forefront of the selection process. As described by Oxfam officials, the passionate convictions of staff allow them to weather external storms and a lack of wider saliency in their cause of interest and, when the opportunity arises, to affect the choice outcomes of a major INGO. Although decision-making is certainly complex and has multiple layers in a confederation such as Oxfam, this evidence points to the significance of affective response in the selection process, and that it goes some way to helping us explain why some issues may be chosen over others.

5.5. Combating Inequalities: Climate Change and Poverty in Britain

To further examine the relative causal determinants of issue selection in Oxfam, it is useful to analyse the motivational logic underpinning two specific, positive and negative cases of selection. To do this, the chapter will presently examine an issue officials have decided to work on, the consequences of climate change for impoverished people (positive case), and an issue they have decided not to work on, poverty in Britain (negative case). To narrow the focus of the analysis, and to reflect the relative autonomy of affiliate groups within the Oxfam confederation, the empirics in the paired comparison will focus on Oxfam GB, the most prominent of the national affiliates.

The pursuit of climate justice has been an increasingly common fixture of Oxfam's agenda over the past two decades. In 2002, for instance, the group published a comprehensive text entitled "Gender, Development, and Climate Change", which warned that, if went unchallenged, the unfolding problems with our climate would likely lead to "loss of life, injury, mass population dislocations, and economic devastation in poor countries."[231] Today, the INGO describes its aims and work on climate as follows:

> "Oxfam campaigns for climate action and works with partners to bring the voices of communities affected by climate change into international negotiations and discussions, to ensure global temperature increases are kept below 1.5C and that people living in developing countries are supported to adapt."[232]

Oxfam's work on climate change has developed into a sophisticated and multi-faceted agenda, that spans many countries. On the planning and capacity building side, they have initiated a "micro-insurance scheme" for small farmers in parts of Ethiopia which are particularly badly hit by drought. In countries such as South Africa, the INGO has contributed to the installation of solar technology to combat emissions and high energy costs. Oxfam has also been active in emergency response related to climate issues: "with our partners we have provided humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of people caught up in deadly floods, storms and droughts. For example, following Cyclone Idai, which left more than 2.2 million people in urgent need of humanitarian aid, we helped deliver clean water, sanitation and hygiene kits to over 500,000 people."[233]

The organization has therefore built up considerable research, competencies, and infrastructure for project delivery to aid people affected by climate change. What explains their decision to select this issue for prioritization? Interviews with informants suggest a number of possible answers, each of which may have contributed to the decision. A senior researcher in Oxfam posited, without probing,

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[231] See: Rachel Masika. 2002. Gender, Development, and Climate Change (Oxfam Focus on Gender Series). Oxfam Publishing.
[232] https://www.oxfam.org/en/what-we-do/issues/tackling-climate-crisis#:~:text=Oxfam%20campaigns%20for%20climate%20action,countries%20are%20supported%20to%20adapt.
[233] Ibid.

that the group's response was something of a "no brainer" as we are currently "in a unique time in human history" (Interview ID: Z). The researcher argued that the past two decades represent a window of opportunity to take action on climate change – what occurs in these years will have a decisive impact on the planet down the line. The logic was therefore one of necessity. It would be grossly negligent of Oxfam, according to this view, not to take the issue on. This perspective aligns with the opinion of another official privy to selection decisions internationally, who suggested that "the main issues [such as climate change] almost select themselves, on the basis of overarching trends" (Interview ID: Y). Since the 1990s, climate change had become a salient topic internationally, especially among INGOs. Heightened attention – as well as growing awareness among policymakers – to the potentially disastrous effects of a heating planet meant the issue was a natural fit for Oxfam.

While perfectly intelligible, each of these responses appear to contradict the criteria for selection which appear in documentary materials and decision-makers refer to in conversations. According to staff, ordinarily two central concerns are issue coverage within the INGO network and the potential to bring added value. As there is no shortage of groups advocating on climate issues – it is now perhaps one of the best covered of any issue area – it is not entirely clear why the criteria of broader coverage and added value did not hold in this instance. Nonetheless, it is plausible that decision-makers deemed climate change of such unique historical importance that they felt that ordinary standards for selection should not apply.

Another official, who operates in advocacy outside of Oxfam GB, offered distinct ideas on what may have driven selection. One the one hand, the "cynical" take would be "that is where the money is", with the INGO pursuing the issue due to the availability of funding for proposals linked to climate change (Interview ID: W). With increased government and public attention to the problem, we have witnessed a proliferation in the finance streams associated with a taking a "greener" approach to living. Oxfam may have seen the issue as an avenue to fund its activities. In addition, the same official pointed out that climate issues had clear links to the organization's core mission of combating poverty, suggesting the group may have had more laudable motives. Weighing these possibilities, they

concluded that the decision "was probably a combination of both" of these drivers (Interview ID: W).

That the issue fit with Oxfam's ethos was a theme reprised by a senior management figure in Oxfam GB, who has been privy to discussions surrounding climate change. They identified a specific source for the decision – the affected people themselves. The informant proffered that selection of the issue resulted from a learning process, wherein Oxfam was implementing projects on the ground in developing countries and feedback was channelled up that affected peoples wished to see more action on climate. Climate was judged to be affecting basic livelihoods, such as the farms of poor communities, access to clean water, and the habitability of land.

How are we to interpret these explanations? One of the difficulties in doing so is that there are plausible stories at different levels of analysis. At a structural level, the 1990s wrought quite marked changes to Oxfam's operational environment, with governments and global humanitarian networks paying greater heed to climate issues. Concomitant with this shift was an increase in the availability of funding and resources for issues connected to climate change. Organizational incentives to accrue financial stability and support for work appear to plug into the shift in Oxfam's environment, making climate issues a reasonable choice for conscientious decision-makers who wished to balance doing good in the world with financial security. At a lower level, the desire on the part of decision-makers to learn from past work, to listen to stakeholders, and to move the Oxfam agenda in line with what would do the most good – it is empirically true the past two decades have been pivotal for the planet's prospects – may also have affected policy outcomes. Of course, it is not certain that officials will always listen to stakeholders when setting their agenda, they often do not, instead relying on the expertise of trained researchers. Taken together, while the evidence for any one explanation appears inconclusive, the fact that Oxfam selected climate change at much the same time the political salience of the issue grew and other INGOs in its operational field were doing similarly, does suggest that structural factors may be of causal import. INGOs have converged in this period, and climate change is one site where this process is evident.

Conversely, in recent decades Oxfam GB appears to have been reluctant to tackle issues to do with poverty in Britain. While the organization has levelled trenchant critiques of capitalist economics, governments in the developing world, and the policies of global institutions, it has – despite having a program in the country since the early 1990s, albeit at a comparatively modest level – largely refrained from replicating this approach with politics and policy in Britain. A number of informants remarked on the incentives to take the issue on – primarily to take an even-handed and less Euro-centric approach to poverty, whereby it is not viewed as "something that just happens over there, and not everywhere." In light of this incentive, and the presence of requisite infrastructure for action, how might we explain this instance of non-selection? A deputy director who has participated in internal debates on this issue laid out their perception of the problem and its potential origins:

> "We seem to think overhauling global capitalism is less risky and more likely than advocating for an increase in carer's allowance in the UK during Covid. Because, to be seen to be politically advocating in the UK, it seems to be far more radical given the political situation we are in" (Interview ID: V).

According to the deputy director, one of the key drivers of Oxfam's decision not to focus on poverty in Britain concerns the INGOs relationship with the UK government in Westminster. The group has traditionally relied – though certainly less so now, after the scandal in Haiti led to cuts to funding – on a close working relationship with the British government, as well as funding from departments like DfiD. To agitate on poverty in Britain would necessitate implicit or direct criticism of existing policy, potentially creating tension with a crucial partner. Given the distinct approaches to welfare policies by UK political parties – with Labour typically more supportive than the Conservatives of such programs – taking action on the issue may lead to accusations of partisan bias on the part of Oxfam. Another official, who has been part of Oxfam for many years and has followed discussions surrounding the issue closely, offered a similar point of view while adding background context:

> "A number of years ago Oxfam got massively burnt by the charity commission, and a group of Tories, because we spoke about inequality and injustice in the UK and we were basically

> told to get back in our lane. The government was happy to talk about inequalities that exist 'out there' in the world, and structural inequalities that lead to poverty. They do not look kindly on critiques of the structural inequalities that lead to UK poverty" (Interview ID: X).

Given these responses, we may interpret the motivational logic as follows. Oxfam originated as a group dedicated to delivering aid and the alleviation of poverty internationally. Its ethos and brand outlook is, by tradition, international in nature. Although there were some modest moves in the 1990s to begin building a program orientated towards issues of poverty and inequality in Britain, this remained relatively small compared to Oxfam GB's other areas of work. In more recent years, when the INGO has released statements on British issues, they were met with hostility by the UK government. With their financial and operational capacities intertwined with the UK government, this placed them in a difficult position. Oxfam appear to have been sensitive to backlash emanating from the government, which have usually viewed it as a body geared towards international problems. Despite a desire to highlight issues of poverty in Britain, the preferences of the UK government mitigated against the actualization of this aspect of their agenda. The reasons for action driving decision-making therefore seem to be strategic in nature, responsive to incentives in the operational environment in Britain.

Informants raised two further factors that may explain Oxfam's approach to poverty in Britain. The first is a collapse in funding in recent years, a re-structuring that has seen the group re-locate resources to areas of the global south, and logistical requirements to scale back operations in, or pull out of, several countries. The second is a perception that, in terms of network coverage, British poverty is already quite well covered by competent charities and organizations. This means that the added value of the Oxfam brand may be greater elsewhere. A senior researcher in Oxfam GB, who has been directly involved in discussions on the issue at a high level, delineated how these dynamics have played out:

> "It is an interesting discussion [poverty in Britain] which has long, contentious roots… The global challenges at the moment, we have removed a separate UK poverty team and focus

> in the structure, but what we have said is our global challenges will include a UK version of it...It is more embedded under global challenges….I think we recognize we are, in our current configuration, downscaling. We have got a huge pull from the confederation to get resources to the global south. So that is an enormous driver of ours to scale down our work here [in the UK], reduce our presence here, and to make sure the money and jobs are elsewhere…There is also the recognition that there are already amazing organizations in the UK working on this, and it is about figuring out what we can piggy-back on and support. So it is recognition that we do not have an advantage in our home market on this" (Interview ID: Z).

At the time of research, internal discussions were once again taking place regarding whether the INGO should take on the issue of poverty in Britain. The sizable, negative effects which Covid-19 has had on the UK economy has been a cause for re-assessment, leading some in the affiliate to believe they should do more on UK issues. This suggests the time-contingent nature of the findings, as well as selection procedures in general. Indeed, if Oxfam GB was not undergoing a process of downscaling, we may well be talking about a positive case of selection. However, although we may speculate as to the outcome of current internal discussions, heretofore the issue has been largely passed over for the past two decades. In terms of explanations, the most plausible based on the evidence appears related to strategic incentives in the INGO's operational environment. Opposition to action on the issue by the UK government – a significant partner of Oxfam in bygone years – makes taking it on a potentially costly decision. Coupled with the decision to re-focus Oxfam toward the global south, and the withdrawal of resources from affiliates such as Oxfam GB, this appears to have been decisive in non-selection.

In respect of the study's theory, the empirical data did not provide much support for heuristics explaining (non-)adoption of these issues. While Oxfam is certainly concerned with violence perpetrated against rights defenders working on environmental issues – a factor we may associate with availability – this does not seem to have been the driving force behind selection. Perceptions

that Britain, despite exhibiting poverty among its population, was relatively well off – thus lacking more 'vivid' forms of suffering' – compared to countries in the Global South, may well have figured in decision-making, but the evidence did not suggest it was decisive. Equally, the use of analogous reasoning (representativeness), nor personal commitments or victim identities (affect), do not appear to have made a significant difference. When we consider the structural factors which seem to have determined Oxfam incorporating issues associated with climate change into its agenda, as well the organizational incentives that shaped their policy on domestic poverty in Britain, evidence from the paired comparison suggests that factors beyond the psychological traits of key decision-makers explain the divergent issue outcomes.

5.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to identify the reasons for action that underpin contrasting patterns of issue selection in Oxfam. Oxfam is a very complicated and, when assessed against the other case studies, quite distinct organization given its confederal structure and thematic focus on poverty relief. Its own distinctive features as perhaps the world's premier INGO dealing with poverty not only makes it an insightful case for inquiry, but also presents analytical challenges in evaluating the study's theory of issue selection. It is sufficient here to briefly reflect on the empirical findings and their implications for the proposed theory.

Prior to conducting the empirical research, Oxfam was considered a difficult test of the study's theory. Its narrow focus on issues linked to poverty appeared to indicate selection may be a more marginal problem for decision-makers. Contrary to these expectations, it was eminently clear from interviews that the selection dilemma was a major source of concern for officials. This was exemplified by one senior member of management who also had experience working for human rights organizations; they argued that the selection dilemma was worse for Oxfam, as they had fewer legal or normative reference frames to ground their work. Another staff member described the

question of selection as the most common they had heard in the office in their eight years with the INGO. The challenge posed by selection is a salient one for Oxfam.

Findings from the chapter provide mixed evidence for the study's theory. Although it appears that individuals matter a great deal in determining outcomes, and that general decision-making on issue selection may well be impacted by heuristics, when we looked more specifically at a pair of positive and negative the theory performed less well. With regard to general decision-making, for instance, there was quite clear empirical support for use of the affect heuristic. Staff agree that the organization is home to many individuals with strong ethical convictions and attachments to particular issue areas. It is this attachment that allows staff to continue with their preferred projects irrespective of shifts in the global priorities of the confederation, or in the external political environment, as well as to take advantages of opportunities and get their issue onto the INGO's agenda. It is the cause-driven and "activist" staff members who tend to be most vocal, and internal lobbying by such individuals can sway fellow team members, helping to determine issue choices within the affiliates. It appears that the convictions of staff are an important ballast that gives order to the general trajectory of Oxfam's work, and that explain its response to shifts in external conditions.

One great distinction between Oxfam and INGOs such as AI or HRW, is the presence of a sophisticated system of monitoring and evaluation. The INGO invests significant resources is assessing its successes and failures, an approach that extends across its advocacy, campaigning, and in particular its service delivery on the ground in developing countries. With a typical project, Oxfam may carry out a report on the strengths and weaknesses of its activities in each quarter, with a more extensive evaluation implemented at the six-month mark. One might think these mechanisms would mitigate the use of the kind of haphazard, analogous reasoning that is characteristic of the representative heuristic. And yet, this does not appear to be the case. Severe problems with information management – reports are often inaccessible to those who need them – seem to manifest as a learning problem for Oxfam officials. Staff are forced to draw lessons to previous work without reliable data to do so, conditions emblematic of representative heuristic. Moreover, we can observe

with specific influential cases, such as the arms trade treaty, that staff often index their current work against singular experiences from the past. Further, informants recognized that key officials tend to engage with analogies to past actions in making their selection choices, and that this appeared to be an effective way to gain agreement across teams. Taken together, the evidence provided support for claims that the representative heuristic contributed to issue outcomes.

In terms of the availability heuristic, the evidence in favour of its use was less strong, though still of note. For instance, though focusing its mission on poverty, Oxfam has worked extensively on the protection of human rights defenders, many of whom are at risk of physical violence. Such issues are prominent among other INGOs, particularly human rights organizations and groups established to highlight abuses of civil and political rights. Moreover, when deciding where to make an intervention, officials weigh the benefits of a policy move against the likely risks faced by their own staff, individuals within their network, and local NGOs. This suggests that vivid forms of suffering – markers of availability – such as physical attacks and abuse, are important considerations for officials, even if, thematically speaking, these problems are outside of their immediate remit. A continued focus on the global south, rather than poverty in richer nations, may also suggest an appreciation for scale and the relative nature of suffering experienced by vulnerable populations.

In contrast, as we have just discussed, the paired comparisons offered little evidence for the theory. The decision to take on issues of inequity associated with climate change appears to be better explained by overarching trends in Oxfam's operational environment; the group incorporated climate issues in its agenda at much the same time many other INGOs did. Non-selection with regard to poverty in Britain seems to be related to strategic incentives in Oxfam GB's domestic polity, where they have faced opposition from the UK government – traditionally a key partner – for attempting advocacy on the issue. The desire of the Oxfam confederation to pull resources from affiliates like Oxfam GB, and to distribute them in countries of the global south, also appears significant. Descaling in this manner left little space for domestic advocacy and campaigning in Britain. Thus, while evidence from the paired comparison confounds the theory it, and other pieces of evidence

from Oxfam's general decision-making, highlight the importance of a variety of alternative factors for selection. These include assessments of added value, the sufficiency of existing issue coverage by other organizations, the prospect of identifiable impact, and the preferences of donors.

The effects of these factors – none of which appear especially dominant – seem to vary depending on a configuration of the others, as well as the form of work Oxfam is participating in. For example, climate issues are very well covered by humanitarian network. Oxfam's added value on the issue is therefore questionable, as are the prospects for impact. And yet, they continue to work on climate as a priority. Similarly, although donors may set the parameters of projects that involved service delivery on the ground in poor countries – a sizable portion of funding is unrestricted and largely reflects donor wishes – they are of less causal relevance to advocacy and campaign work. Issue selection in Oxfam is a layered process, complicated by the organizations own structure and the interaction of multiple criteria, both formal and informal. From the evidence presented above, we may conclude that, in certain instances, heuristic-led decision-making appears to contribute to this process.

Chapter 6: Survey Experiment – INGO Officials

6.1 Introduction

As part of the *dominant-less-dominant* mixed-method model employed in this study, the proposed theory shall undergo further investigation through an experimental framework. Experimental methods have proved effective in assessing the micro-foundational assumptions of IR theories, as well as in investigating how motivational portraits of decision-makers relate to choice outcomes across time and institutional environments (Tingley 2017; Bakker 2017). In the spirit of inclusive research paradigms such as critical realism or pragmatism – which embrace "a plurality of assumptions and methods" – the ontological and epistemological bases of these tools in respect of causal identification are aligned (Doyle et al. 2016, p. 625). However, in contrast to the case studies – the bulk of the empirical analysis – examining psychological mechanisms using a survey experiment, and therein estimating precise treatment effects, may be best pursued by incorporating theoretical postulates within a hypothesis-testing framework, constructing simplified treatments and controls, and quantifying outcomes of interest. One of the key facets of the qualitative component of the design is recognition of the contextual utility of cognitive heuristics, where each may operate in conjunction with the other. An experimental set-up, on the other hand, allows us to disentangle factors of interest and test independent effects. To do so, and prior to explicating the experimental design and operationalization of key factors, we may briefly re-capitulate the theory and specify the hypotheses.

As noted in Chapter 2, when the availability heuristic is used, judgments concerning the probability of an event occurring are positively related to the ease with which an example or case of the event is retrieved in memory. Tversky and Kahneman (1973, p. 208) note that our life experience leads us to believe that large and more frequent classes of events are easier to retrieve in our memory than smaller, less likely classes of events. A person may be regarded as using the availability heuristic when

they estimate the frequency or likelihood of a phenomena by the ease with which cases or examples of that phenomena may be brought to mind. The availability heuristic may bias decision-making as situation-specific contextual variables are neglected during this process (Kahneman and Tversky 1974). The use of the availability heuristic can lead to bias in humanitarian decision-making because issues which are easier to recall to memory may not be those issues which are most pervasive, have a higher probability of occurring, or are of greatest consequence in reducing the harm suffered by victims.

Humanitarian issues associated with acute violence, for instance, whether directly relevant to the issue under consideration or not, may come more readily to mind than events which occur more frequently, involve higher levels of death and suffering, but evoke less vivid images of suffering. INGO decision-makers may then attach particular urgency to one issue over another not on the basis of rationally optimizing reduction of harm, but on intuitive judgements about the seriousness of the favoured issue due to the cognitive ease of retrieval of imagery associated with it. Although vivid imagery and ease of cognitive retrieval may extend well beyond the suffering of violence, for the purposes of the experiment it is on this dimension of the availability heuristic that the analysis will focus. In light of this, the first hypothesis is proposed as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1) – Humanitarian issues are more likely to be prioritized by INGOs when they are perceived by key decision-makers to involve instances of acute violence.

A central feature of utilizing the representative heuristic pertains to the mental ranking of the relevance of information in judgment formation. When humans employ this heuristic they evaluate the probability of an event belonging to a broader class of events in accordance with two central criteria: 1) to what extent the prospective event is similar to a parent population which they have mentally categorized and 2) to what extent does the chain of events preceding a potential phenomenon resemble the salient characteristics of the process leading to events in the parent population. Thus, event A may be regarded as more worthy of attention than event B if the former event subjectively. appears more representative of a population of more serious humanitarian

problems than the latter (Kahneman and Tversky 1974, p. 26). In other words, decision-makers use the representative heuristic to make a probability judgment about whether a phenomena belongs to a particular mental category based on perceived similarities between them. They will tend to favour events which tell a good story and are analogous to, or fit well within, pre-existing mental categories (McDermott 2001, p. 11).

Decision-makers may favour issues which they categorize within a broader set that they regard as important, often to the neglect of contextual detail. This is commonly done through processes of analogous reasoning to past cases they view as salient (see: Khong 1992). In INGOs, representativeness may lead to the prioritization of issues which decision-makers perceive as resembling a category of past events which they already understand as seminally important and wish to apply the lessons of in their current work. For example, decision-makers may be more likely to select issues which they perceive to be analogous to events surrounding recent, major humanitarian catastrophes, such as the conflict unfolding in Syria since 2011. By evaluating an issue option in terms of what occurred in cases like Syria, decision-makers may conflate the outcomes of both cases and regard that issue option as of particular moral concern. Indeed, INGO officials may be particularly sensitive to historical cases where they perceive remedial actions to have been insufficient in preventing abuses and alleviating suffering. On this basis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2) — Humanitarian issues are more likely to be prioritized by INGOs when they are perceived by key decision-makers to resemble the circumstances preceding high-profile humanitarian crises

The affect heuristic also functions as a mental shortcut for weighing pros and cons in decision-making processes. When using this heuristic people interpret levels of risk and the probability of certain outcomes through emotive intuitions. Much like the role of memory and similarity in the availability and representative heuristics respectively, the role of emotion in the affect heuristic may be regarded as an orienting mechanism for judgment formation and decision-making under conditions of uncertainty (Kahneman and Frederick 2002). Emotional reaction derived from

experiential thought may be activated in response to a given event, ultimately informing decision-making to the detriment of rational, deliberative thinking. As Slovic et al. (2007, p. 1335) note, when interpreting events "...people consult or refer to an "affect pool" containing all the positive and negative tags consciously or unconsciously associated with..." events and other phenomena. When individuals have a positive affective response to a phenomenon, they perceive gains to be high and risks to be low. When a negative affective response is stimulated, people are more likely to judge the risks to be high and the benefits to be low. For example, we might expect INGO officials to have a positive affective response to victims of human rights violations who they share a political or cultural affinity with, such as a commitment to democratic norms. In this case, decision-makers may be more likely to select an issue if the affected individuals or group are pro-democracy, rather than if they oppose democracy. This leads to the third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 (H3) — Humanitarian issues are more likely to be prioritized by INGOs when key decision-makers perceive a shared cultural identity with the victims.

6.2 Research Design

To test the hypotheses the study implements a discrete paired-choice conjoint analysis. A non-probability sample of 175 NGO workers active in the human rights sector constitutes the subject pool, with a response rate of 97%.[234] Conjoint analysis involves the construction of multiple experimental manipulations within a survey design that pertain to factors of theoretical interest. This is conducive to eliciting stated subject preferences and examining how individuals make multidimensional choices (Hainmueller et al. 2015, p. 2395). Conjoint analysis is a powerful tool for causal inference in political science as – unlike many other experimental designs – it allows the

[234] Subjects were recruited from two of the organizations in the case studies: Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The high response rate – 97% – is a function of how the survey was fielded, with the researcher present on each site with tablet computers. The high rate helps to mitigate attributional differences between those who entered the survey and those who completed it. Further information on the fielding of the experiment is included in section 6.4.

researcher to incorporate multiple treatments and simultaneously test a large number of competing hypotheses. As the impact of different treatment components are measured against the same outcome "…they can be compared on the same scale to evaluate the relative influence of the components and to assess the plausibility of multiple theories" (Hainmueller et al. 2013 p. 2). This can be achieved without encountering problems of statistical power that may undermine alternative designs, such as vignette studies (see: Hainmueller et al. 2014). The approach also helps to reduce "the imbalance between background characteristics" for causal identification (Muradova and Gildea 2019, p. 7).

Conjoint analysis is a particularly appropriate tool to disentangle the psychological micro-foundations of decision-makers' preferences. Issue selection in INGOs is likely to be informed by multidimensional choices. Decision-makers must select between issues that vary along multiple dimensions, with preference formation perhaps the result of a complex set of causal drivers. In isolation, observational data would be unsuited to the job of precisely distinguishing the causal implications of each of these behavioural drivers. Conventional experimental designs are poorly equipped to investigate multidimensional decision-making of this kind. In addition to limitations surrounding statistical power and number of variables that may be included in the analysis and statistical power, such techniques often rely on composite variables that may obscure the causal component driving participant responses. This leaves the researcher unable to identify the exact element that affected the outcome variable, while also being unsure about its relative causal effect in light of excluded confounders (Hainmueller et al. 2013).

For reasons of expense and convenience, experimental research has often relied on a narrow database, with samples drawn from student populations and opt-in online platforms. Nonrepresentative samples of this kind can hinder external validity, as respondents may differ from elite decision-makers in crucial ways. For instance, INGO decision-makers may have a high level of specialist expertise, years of experience in their field, and particular dispositional traits that set them apart from the general population. Inferences derived from convenience samples cannot easily be

transposed to these kinds of actors. As Linde and Vis (2017, p. 102) note in their study of politicians and prospect theory, much of the evidence linking experimental findings in psychology to elite political actors is inconclusive. By fielding the survey experiment with INGO workers directly, this study can make a much more plausible case for the external validity of its results (Druckman and Kam 2011). Of course, this does not negate issues of external validity entirely. By solely using participants recruited from human rights organizations, this may lead to particular biases in the data related to how these officials are trained to think about selection. Their practical and conceptual reference frames – e.g. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights treaties, and so on – may imbue practitioners with a particular sense of issue hierarchies that varies in the humanitarian sector more broadly. Recognizing this limitation, and the inherent difficulties in realizing representativeness on this dimension, fielding the survey with INGO decision-makers helps to mitigate issues of external validity.

The dependent variable in the experiment is issue selection – subjects are instructed to make a discrete choice between five paired scenarios, creating the pooled estimation dataset of 1750 observations.[235] To optimize observations while mitigating test-retest effects, boredom effects, and satisficing, individuals will make decisions between five pairs as part of a between-subjects design. Measuring the dependent variable through discrete choice has the advantage of approximating real-world decision-making and, as a result, improving ecological validity (Hauser 2007). Modelling real world decision tasks in this manner also helps to bridge differences between the experimental setting and comparable choices in actual social and political environments. This technique has been shown to generate data which closely matches benchmark results drawn from the field, and therein to reliably promote external validity (see: Hainmueller et al. 2014). Causal effects are estimated through calculation of the Average Marginal Causal Effect (AMCE), that is the average difference in

[235] Due to practical limitations in recruiting an elite sample of this kind, 183 participants began the survey. After cleaning the data 175 participants were included in the pooled dataset. Dropouts had no distinguishing feature, with the majority appearing to erroneously end the session near the end. In line with previous political science research using conjoint analysis, a pooled dataset of 1750 observations appears sufficiently powered to draw reliable causal inferences (Hainmueller et al. 2014).

probability of an issue being selected across two attribute values, taking an average across all potential combinations of the other attributes. Conjoint designs often require making inferences on the basis of a sample of issue profiles, as the potential number of unique profiles is typically greater than those which will be observed in the study. Despite this, as Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015, p. 537) note, in calculating the AMCE "…the estimation of treatment effects is straightforward on account of the randomization and the resulting orthogonality of each attribute with respect to every other."

Despite the many advantages of conjoint analysis, so as not to overclaim we may briefly acknowledge some limitations of the technique, as well as with experimental approaches generally. In an effort to isolate causal relationships, experimental research of this kind requires the construction of artificial and hypothetical decisional environments that are divorced from the real-world settings where preference formation takes place. For instance, when choosing between helping people affected by conflict, disease, or poverty, it is unlikely that the true gravity of this decision – and thus processes of attitudinal formation among respondents – can be fully replicated. This diminishes the mundane realism of experimental techniques and raises question marks as to how well findings can be extrapolated to real world phenomena. Second, a related problem concerns the approximation of complex political concepts in the operationalization of key variables. As with quantitative work more generally, experimental designs involve the use of simplified, "thin" concepts that may be unrepresentative of the political behaviour putatively under examination. This can have a detrimental effect on external validity and may lead to false conclusions about real-world relationships. Third, studies of this kind are restricted to examining the relationship between a finite 47 set of variables. This can lead to confounding by unobservables as participants infer additional factors in the decision-making process, even if the requirements of random assignment are met. Fourth, while experiments may be adept at analysing political relationships at the individual level, they are less well suited to investigations at higher levels of analysis. This is troublesome for examining issue selection, given that INGO decision-making will most likely be affected by group dynamics in institutional settings.

6.3 Survey Instrument

After reading an introductory text containing a consent agreement,[236] participants were presented with a hypothetical scenario involving a discrete choice between two issue options. In the scenario, they were put in the position of consultant for an NGO that was considering two issues for their next campaign and were unsure which one should be prioritized. Placing participants in the role of consultant for an NGO helped minimize organizational effects associated with respondents' prior beliefs about the kinds of issues that warrant prioritization, encouraging them to evaluate the issue attributes more objectively. Participants were instructed that they would view descriptions of issues that were prepared by the NGO and would vary on multiple dimensions. They were told they would have to select a preference between five rounds of issue pairs. The text read:

> You have been approached by a representative from an independent, non-governmental organization (NGO) working in the humanitarian sector. The organization works on many different kinds of humanitarian issues, and requires your consultancy advice in selecting their next issue to campaign on. The representative informs you that they have two potential issues in mind, but are unsure which of the two should be prioritized over the other.
>
> In the following, you will be asked to make a choice between two issues that require humanitarian assistance. The NGO has provided information on different aspects of each issue to help you make your decision. After your selection you will be shown another pair of issues to choose between. In total, you will be asked to select between 5 pairs of issues.

Each issue option varied across eight attributes which correspond to the hypotheses and factors associated with competing explanations. In turn, the values of each of these characteristics varied. The attributes and values were conceptualized and designed to prevent implausible combinations of issues characteristics from arising and biasing the results, thus eliminating the need to constrain the full randomization of combinations in the issue profiles (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). The text of

[236] Included in Appendix C.

the item recording the selection outcome read as follows: "If you had to choose, which of these two issues do you believe should be prioritized over the other?".

In respect to the first hypothesis, which relates to acute instances of violence, this was operationalized through a binary attribute which described the nature of the issue. Participants are either treated that the potential victims in the scenario were "at risk of violent killing" or "require humanitarian aid". As noted in the theoretical discussion, the availability heuristic suggests that ease of cognitive retrieval of associative events with a particular issue may increase the probability of selection and, by extension, that issues that exhibit more vivid suffering – by virtue of being more memorable – are more likely to be prioritized than events which include less explicit suffering. Due to the relatively subjective nature of what constitutes 'acute' violence or not, rather than constructing a multidimension scale with several values (potentially confounding estimations) a simplified binary treatment was utilized. In the experiment, the nature of the issue was therefore manipulated so that – while both possible scenarios may be considered important – it either involves direct violence or does not.

For the second hypothesis, which refers to similarities with high-profile humanitarian crises, I manipulated whether or not the NGO provided information on a case precedent for the issue. Participants were told that analysts have identified similarities to the crisis in Syria, or have not identified similarities to previous humanitarian crises, again a binary treatment. Because participants are provided with several pertinent background characteristics, including the precise scale and nature of the issue, we should not observe a significant effect of this attribute except through use of analogous reasoning and representativeness. Furthermore, to test the third hypothesis the identity of the victim group was manipulated across two levels. Respondents were informed that those affected by the issue were either supporters of democracy or they were not. According to H3, INGO officials may have positive affective response to victims of human rights violations who they share a political or cultural affinity with, such as a commitment to democratic norms, and are thus more likely to prioritize their welfare during issue selection.

In terms of competing explanations, the experiment included five additional factors. First, the level of media coverage which an issue has attracted was manipulated. A number of studies have proffered the role of media coverage in shaping political behaviour, including international responses to humanitarian crises (Jakobsen 1996; Livingston 1997). Sensitivity to media coverage may improve the prospects of policy impact, increase the public salience of organizational behaviour, and attract funding streams. This attribute had three levels. Media coverage could either be "low", "moderate", or "high".

Second, the financial costs associated with an issue option was included as an attribute. Prior research indicates that financial pressures may be a key determinant in INGO behaviour, due to an increasingly competitive organizational environment (Cooley and Ron 2002). Costs incurred for a project may alter the calculations of decision-makers, as they seek to minimize financial outlays. Officials may have mixed motives on this front, as healthy finances are not only important to organizational status and survival, but also to their ability to take on a stable of issues and affect policy change. Attributes were specified across four levels. A prospective issue could either require 1%, 3%, 5% of 7% of the project's budget. Values are moderately stratified so as to promote mundane realism, as well as to provide an appropriately conservative test of the attribute.

Third, treatment effects of the heuristics may be biased by certain background features of the INGO, potentially compromising information equivalence in the experimental manipulations (Muradova and Gildea 2019, p. 6). When presented with information in a scenario, subjects may update their beliefs about, or infer, other attributes, which in turn may contaminate assignment of the treatment. Specifying these background characteristics may mitigate against bias, as it helps "rule out at least some sources of IE violations" (Dafoe et al. 2018, p. 401). One such background characteristic, which may be inferred into the scenario by participants – recruited from particular human rights groups – based on experience and priors, is the expertise of the NGO they are consulting for. One might also theorize that an NGO will select issues that are consistent with the expertise of staff, as this may aid group reputation and policy impact. NGO expertise may therefore represent a plausible

alternative explanation. In light of this, an attribute on the expertise of the NGO is included with three levels. The NGO can either have a "low", "moderate", or "high" level of expertise on the issue option.

Fourth, to account for the severity of the issue the numbers of lives at risk (deaths) were manipulated in the survey. Existing literature on humanitarian missions, such as the deployment of peacekeepers, finds that "one of the best predictors of UN intervention is the number of deaths in a conflict" (Gilligan and Stedman 2003). Given the stated purpose of most INGOs is to lessen human harm, and that humanitarian action by INGOs may be less politicized than UN interventions, there is good reason to suspect that processes of issue selection may be, at least in part, shaped by the numbers of lives in jeopardy. This attribute was manipulated across four levels, 200, 1000, 5000, or 25000.

Finally, as prior research suggests policy impact may be a consideration in agenda-setting in INGOs, the survey included an attribute on the likelihood that the selected project will help victims. For both normative and strategic reasons, INGO officials may be eager to realize demonstratable policy impact. In certain instances, the provision of funding from external bodies may be tied to particular metrics of performance. Moreover, given the proliferation of the number of INGOs operating globally, as well as the expansion of their competencies, placing an emphasis on impact may help groups to close the "legitimacy gap" surrounding INGO activities (Collingwood and Logister 2005). In the experiment, I manipulated the probability of achieving impact across four levels: the NGO either had a 20%, 40%, 60% or 80% chance of helping those at risk. To control for ordering effects the order of presentation and values of the attributes were fully randomized (see: Table 3).

In contrast to the process-tracing element of the project, the language of probability is more germane to the experimental component of the methodology. In this vein, it is certainly conceivable that, beyond the hypotheses, a number of additional attributes included in the analysis may return significant results. Indeed, given the nature of the conjoint design and the AMCE – based as it is on the average difference in probability issue selection across two attribute values – we may anticipate

such a result. What is important for us is not that these attributes are insignificant, but that the attributes associated with the heuristics contribute to selection outcomes in the manner predicted.

Table 3. Attributes in Conjoint Analysis.

Attributes	Values
Media Coverage	Media coverage has been low.
	Media coverage has been moderate.
	Media coverage has been high.
Project Cost	1% of annual projects budget.
	3% of annual projects budget.
	5% of annual projects budget.
	7% of annual projects budget.
Likelihood project will help victims	20% chance of helping victims.
	40% chance of helping victims.
	60% chance of helping victims.
	80% chance of helping victims.
NGO expertise	NGO has a low level of expertise on this issue.
	NGO has a moderate level of expertise on this issue.
	NGO has a high level of expertise on this issue.
Nature of issue	The victims require humanitarian aid.
	The victims are at risk of violent killing.
Number of lives at risk (deaths)	200
	1000
	5000
	25000
Case precedent	Analysts have not identified similarities to previous humanitarian crises.
	Analysts have identified similarities to the Syrian Civil War.
Victim group	The victims support democracy.
	The victims do not support democracy.

After being presented with the issue pairs, participants were required to choose which issue they believed should be prioritised by the NGO. Including a forced-choice paired scenario in the design had several benefits. As Muradova and Gildea (2019, p. 9) note, "paired designs have been shown to more accurately reproduce the effects of real-world attributes relative to single-profile designs when measured against behavioral benchmarks, primarily as a result of greater respondent engagement and reduced satisficing".[237] Moreover, discrete issue profiles approximates real-world choice tasks faced

[237] See: Hainmueller et al., 2015: 2399.

by INGO officials, where they must weigh competing concerns and information before settling on a particular research area or campaign. Of course, in real-world scenarios INGO decision-makers do not face forced choices when choosing between issues, typically retaining the option of passing over issues under consideration. While this may the undermine mundane realism of the tasks, this is offset by the comparative benefits of the approach, which has been demonstrated to increase levels of engagement by participants and to result in accurate causal estimates (Muradova and Gildea 2019; Hainmueller et al., 2015). Moreover, after recording responses to the fifth pair of issues, participants were asked to explain that decision in an open-text item. Embedding this item in the experiment was conducive to identifying the precise rationale and – in a more contextualized manner – the set of factors that primarily drove selection choices. This provided additional insight into the deliberations of participants and, by virtue of presenting an open-text item over multiple choice, mitigated risks of priming respondents.[238]

6.4 Fielding the Experiment

The survey experiment was implemented with members of staff at Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. It was fielded at their respective headquarter offices in the UK and US during two waves in May and September 2019. In the first wave, the researcher was granted permission to field the survey on-site at the New York office of HRW. Participants had the option to complete the survey on tablet computers provided or through an online link circulated to staff members. The online link was also circulated to staff in other national offices. In the second wave, the researcher fielded the experiment on-site among staff in the International Secretariat of Amnesty. Again, staff had the option to complete the survey on tablets provided by the research or via an online link that was circulated both in the IS and other sections of Amnesty. To enhance the representativeness of the sample, subjects were recruited across different levels and sections within both INGOs. Several

[238] See: Muradova and Gildea 2019, p. 10.

survey items were included to record organizational affiliation, occupational rank, demographics, level of education, ideology, experience in the INGO sector, and whether individuals completed the survey via tablet or online link. Given the difficulties in accessing – and time-pressured faced by – professional staff in INGOs of this kind, the decision was made to field the survey on-site to improve response rates.

Figure 8. Sample Choice Task

	Issue 1	Issue 2
Media Coverage	Media coverage has been moderate.	Media coverage has been moderate.
Project Cost	7% of annual projects budget.	5% of annual projects budget.
Likelihood project will help victims	20% chance of helping victims.	40% chance of helping victims.
NGO expertise	The NGO has a high level of expertise on this issue.	The NGO has a high level of expertise on this issue.
Nature of issue	The victims require humanitarian aid.	The victims require humanitarian aid.
Number of lives at risk (deaths)	200 lives at risk.	25,000 lives at risk.
Case precedent	Analysts have not identified similarities to previous humanitarian crises.	Analysts have identified similarities to the Syrian Civil War.
Victim group	The victims do NOT support democracy.	The victims support democracy.

Prior to presenting the results, we may specify a number of descriptive statistics in relation to the sample. In terms of participant affiliation, 61% and 39% of the sample was drawn from Amnesty International and HRW respectively. These proportions reflect the relative size of each INGO and, as a consequence, the availability of staff at each research site. The distribution of experience (in years) across the INGOs was: 1-3 years (17%); 3-5 years (35%); 5-10 years (27%); 10+ years (21%). In terms of staff ranking in the INGOs, 29% identified as junior staff (new hires and interns), 57% as mid-level staff, and 14% as senior staff. The distribution of both the experience and ranking variables

suggests that the experiment captured diverse perspectives within the organizations. The mean age was 38.5 with a range of 21-64 years, and the majority of participants were either US or UK nationals (52%).

6.5 Results and Discussion

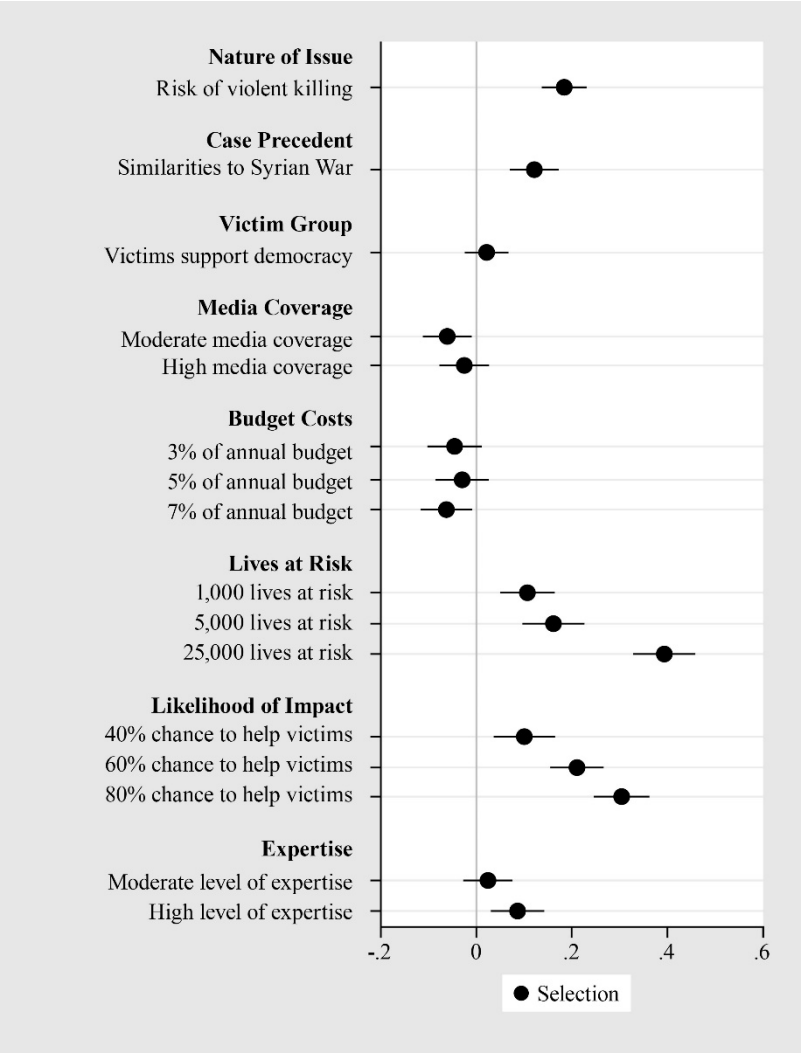
As a preliminary step the data was cleaned, with a small number of duplicate and incomplete responses removed using listwise deletion. The pooled data corresponded to 1,750 observations. Figure 9 presents the results for all participants. Examining Figure 9, point estimates – indicated by the dots – are included with 95% confidence intervals. The vertical line at zero represents the base category for each attribute,[239] with point estimates to the right illustrating an increased probability of an issue being selected based on that value, and to the left indicating a negative causal effect. For instance, with regard to the attribute Media Coverage (baseline category: "Media coverage has been low") we can observe that a moderate level of media coverage has a significant, negative effect, where the likelihood of selection is reduced by 6%. These estimates are calculated using a regression model where the selection variable is regressed across indicators for each value of the attributes, excluding the benchmark values (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015, p. 537).

The results indicate that the INGO staff included in the study are more likely to select an issue for attention if it involves violent killing. An issue that involves violence is 18.5 percentage points more likely to be chosen when compared to an issue that does not, using the need for humanitarian aid as the reference category ($\beta = 0$; SE = 0.02). While we cannot entirely rule out alternative micro-motives for this finding – privileging of violent issues over non-violent issues may partially speak to prevailing organization norms, or instrumental motives surrounding a desire to attract supporters for the INGO – given that participants were placed in the position of external consultant for an

[239] Please note: the exact wording of each attribute and value has been changed to ensure ease of visualization. The results are derived from the attributes and values depicted in Figure 9.

unspecified INGO, these alternative interpretations appear unlikely. We can conclude that this result strongly aligns with the predictions of H1 and offers support for this hypothesis.

Figure 9. Effects of Issue Attributes on the Probability of Selection



Estimates of the effects of issue attribute values on the probability of being selected for prioritisation by the NGO, based on OLS model. The bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Deviation from the line at zero indicates the value for the reference category for the attribute.[240]

[240] The presentation and visualization of results follows: Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015, p. 538.

Regarding H2, which relates to the effect of analogous reasoning to past cases, the results find a sizable and significant effect of the corresponding attribute, that is whether or not subjects were treated so that the issue had similarities to the Syrian crises. This finding suggests that if an issue appears comparable to events surrounding a major and recent humanitarian crisis, it is 12.3% (SE=0.02) more likely to be selected. This finding is particularly notable given that, in the conjoint design, important variables were controlled for, such as the nature of the issue, the humanitarian scale in terms of lives at risk, and opportunity for policy impact. Having controlled for these background factors, we can be reasonably confident that the treatment of perceived similarities to Syria had a robust causal effect.

In contrast, turning to H3 we observe that the identity of the victim group, operationalized in terms of their attitudes toward democracy, does not have a significant effect on the probability of selection. There are a number of potential explanations for this result. For normative or instrumental reasons – or a combination of both – decision-makers may not want to take sides in a humanitarian crisis. To do so may raise ethical qualms at the core of their humanitarian work, or invite accusations of partiality which could damage an INGO's reputation and undermine their work, both in terms of future support and access to important actors or research sites. Another possibility is that being in favour of democracy was not a salient consideration for officials, and was insufficient to alter their preferences. INGO staff may instead value another dimension of victim groups, such as whether or not they have respected the human rights of other populations. An additional explanation may be that the finding is an artefact of the survey method. Officials may well have a conscious or unconscious bias toward pro-democratic victim groups, but due to social desirability bias – INGO workers may be unlikely to admit distinct attitudes toward victims of abuses – there may be a divergence between stated and actual preferences in the results. In any event, it appears that H3 is not supported by the empirical evidence in the experiment.

As an exploratory test, all combinations of interaction effects across each of the three factors associated with the hypotheses were tested. This included three two-way interactions and one three-

way interaction. However, none of the interaction terms were significant. This suggests that, for the respondents, the heuristics did not have an additive effect when operating in conjunction with each other.

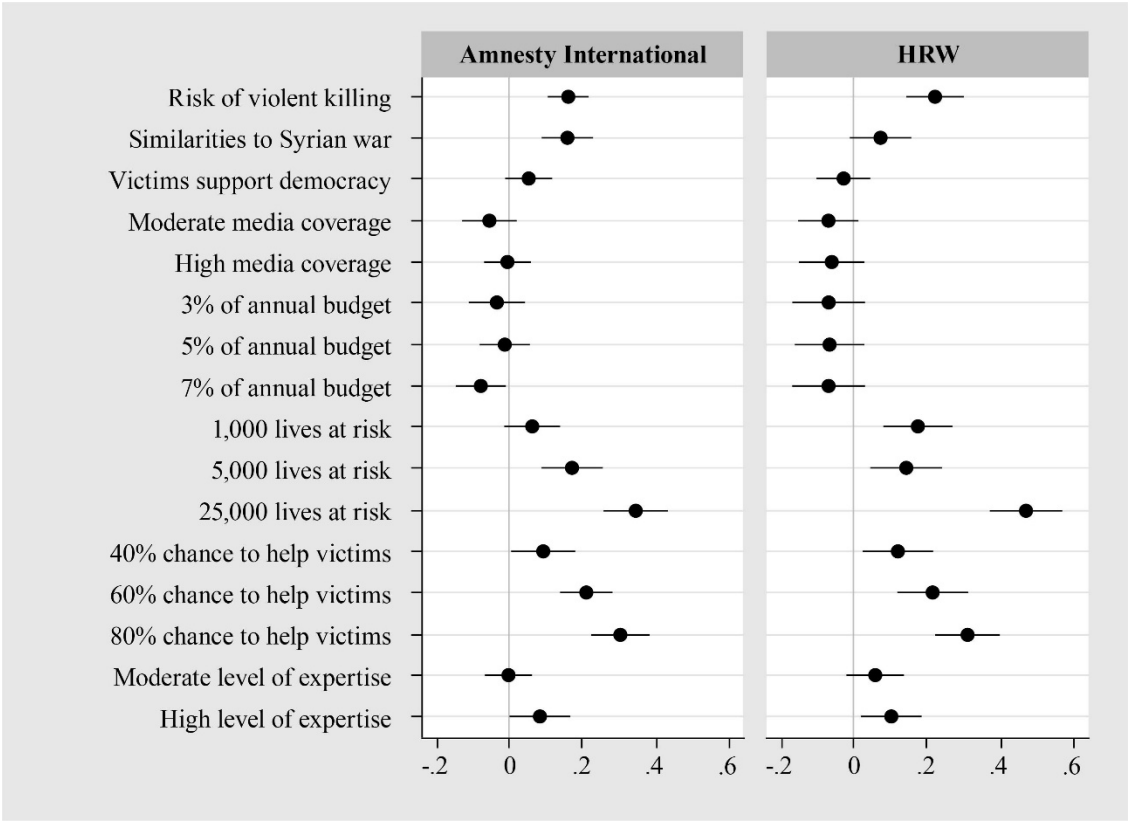
Among the other issue attributes, it is clear that the number of lives at risk was a crucial factor in the decision-making of respondents. Compared to the base category of 200 lives, the probability of an issue being selected increased by 11% if 1,000 lives were at risk (SE=0.03), 16% if 5,000 lives were at risk (SE=0.03), and – the largest effect size of any attribute value in the experiment – 39% if 25,000 lives were at risk (SE=0.03). This finding is a strong indication that the scale of the problem denoted by the issue options was a key consideration for participants. They appear particularly concerned with coming to the aid of as many people as possible. One additional point of interpretation is that, by virtue of the attribute values being expressed numerically, the exposition of the contrast between values may have been especially clear and salient for subjects, a noteworthy aspect of the survey design when contrasting results across attributes. While this attribute does not directly relate to one of the hypotheses, a particular concern for harm reduction on the part of officials accords with the underlying motives imputed by the theoretical framework.

As one might expect, the probability of realizing impact on an issue has a positive, incremental effect on the likelihood of it being selected. An 60% and 80% probability of helping victims increases the chance of selection by 21% (SE=0.03) and 30% (SE=0.03) respectively, quite strong effect sizes. This is in line with much of the literature on INGOs which imputes altruistic motives on the part of decision-makers. However, this finding may also be consistent with a more self-serving explanation, as demonstrating impact can be an important factor for an INGO to attract funding from donors. While the mechanism is uncertain, helping victims appears to be one of the most important variables in the calculations of respondents.

Examining the other attributes, the results indicate that an INGO having a high level of expertise on an issue means it is 8% (SE=0.03) more likely to be selected, while a moderate level of expertise is insufficient to produce a significant effect. Similarly, if an issue uses up 7% of the organization's

project's budget, it has a negative and significant impact on its chance of selection. When interpreting this finding, one might keep in mind that this variable was operationalized in terms of 2% incremental portions of the annual budget. Presenting the information in this manner, rather than in absolute financial terms, may have mitigated against a stronger effect size and significant findings across lower levels above the reference category. Finally, a moderate level of media coverage of an issue seems to decrease its prospects for selection. While the mechanism behind this is unclear, we might speculate that a moderate level of media coverage may suggest that other actors are active on the issue already, and that the INGO may therefore be unable to maximize gains from adopting that issue into its agenda. Overall, however, respondents appear relatively insensitive to manipulation of the treatment on media coverage, as high coverage is not significant.

Figure 10. Effects of Issue Attributes on the Probability of Selection by INGO Affiliation



The research design also allows for the evaluation of several prospective moderators. One explanation for selection may pertain to organizational effects, perhaps derived from an INGO's historical evolution, internal structure, training programs, or cultural norms and practices. Figure 10 shows the marginal effects of issue attributes based on the organizational affiliation of respondents. The results – indicating broad symmetry across both groups – do not provide much evidence that INGO affiliation affects selection choices. One difference is that for Amnesty officials the second attribute, whether or not there are similarities to the Syrian civil war, improves the prospects of selection by 15.7% (SE=.03) while this figure is reduced to 7.5% (SE=.04) for HRW. We can also see that 7% budget costs has a modest and negative effect for Amnesty staff, but this value is not significant with respondents from HRW. Overall, we can conclude that staff from both Amnesty International and HRW appear to reason about selection in similar ways, and the results provide little indication of organizational effects. In addition, similar analyses were run to explore how the rank of officials and their level of experience impact choice outcomes. One might hypothesise that more senior and experienced officials may evaluate issues on the basis of different metrics and – due to the expertise and training they have accumulated – perhaps be less susceptible to the effects of heuristics. However, the data provides little evidence for this, with respondent choices quite consistent across these characteristics and reflective of the main findings. Perhaps worth noting, officials with over 10 years of experience in the sector were the only category of respondent for which a high probability of achieving impact (31%; SE=.06) and helping victims had a larger marginal effect on selection than the scale of the crisis (28%; SE=.07).

6.6 Conclusion

Despite the proffered role of issue characteristics in extant literature on issue selection, this component of the additive MM design is the first to identify discrete issue attributes and evaluate their causal effect experimentally. As the theoretical and empirical scope of this literature is limited, this chapter is the first scholarly work to introduce conjoint analysis to the study of issue selection,

allowing for comparison of attributes using a standardized scale. Importantly, the method also allows for the testing of hypothesized effects in the presence of a number of relevant background factors, and to make inferences about their relative causal impact.

The findings provide support for two of the hypotheses. Against a baseline category involving a requirement for humanitarian aid, an issue was substantially more likely to be selected by respondents if the potential victims were at risk of violent killing. A marginal effect of 18.5% shows strong support for H1. Similarly, probability of selection increased if respondents were treated to infer similarities between the issue option they were presented with and the Syrian civil war. The marginal effect – in conjunction with relevant control variables – was sufficiently large to suggest that analogous reasoning may well play an important role in shaping selection outcomes. The data therefore lends support to H2.

On the other hand, the identity of the victim group did not produce a significant effect. As noted, there may be a variety of reasons for this. Relational identity between decision-maker and victim is a complex and multifaceted relationship, and is thus difficult to capture in an experimental set-up that requires disaggregated, 'thin' operationalizations of concepts. It is certainly possible that operationalizing victim identity in terms of democracy meant the attribute had little influence on participants' reasoning process, while an alternative design decision – such as the group's attitude toward human rights – may have played a larger part in their deliberations. Moreover, it is also plausible that participants have incentives – both moral and strategic – not to appear partial to victim sub-types, so as to project consistency in their advocacy and campaign work. Of course, the affect heuristic has additional dimensions and broader implications for preference formation than cultural affiliation, as discussed in the qualitative aspect of the design. This said, we may conclude that the experimental data does not provide support for H3.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the study's theoretical framework, an underlying predicate of the theory is the claim, in line with much of the literature on INGOs, that INGO officials are primarily motivated to lessen human harm. One might also impute strategic motives to ground this prediction, as

effective altruistic action may also improve organizational reputation and attract donors. Although we cannot be certain of the mechanism(s), the results suggest that the scale of the issue in terms of the number of people at risk has a large and significant marginal effect on selection. Equally, issues that encompassed a higher chance of helping victims were much more likely to be chosen by the sample of respondents, suggesting a pragmatic concern with achieving impact was a salient consideration.

The central results of the experiment also prove very similar across a number of conditions, including the organizational affiliation of respondents. Whether a respondent worked for Amnesty of HRW did not appear to matter to any significant degree. Although, as both of these groups are human rights organizations, we cannot extrapolate to those INGO which are orientated toward development and humanitarian work. Interestingly, the rank of officials within their INGO, as well as their years of experience, appear to have – with minor exception – very little effect on which kinds of issues they select for attention.

In sum, the experiment provides additional support for the studies theory. Issue attributes associated with the availability and representative heuristic both produce significant results with large effect sizes. The findings also suggest that these are not the only factors of importance when respondents choose between issue options. The scale of the crisis at hand, and the potential to reduce harm, both appear to be key factors that affect selection.

Chapter 7: Conclusion – Issue Selection in Comparative Perspective

This project began with an empirical observation. In 2016 Amnesty International, perhaps the world's most prominent human rights INGO, published a policy in favour of the decriminalization of sex work. This episode is instructive, not only because AI's policy choice appears to confound the expectations of dominant IR paradigms – the decision conflicted with the organizational interests of AI, as well as norms in the women's movement – but also because it seems indicative of a broader pattern of INGO behaviour. To date, theorists have struggled to make sense of this pattern, with the postulates of existing frameworks consistent with cases of non-selection, suggesting "such explanations are insufficient theoretically" (Carpenter 2007, p. 100). This raises question marks, previously flagged by IR scholars,[241] over the ability of the main IR paradigms to adequately explain the behaviour of non-state humanitarian actors. It is my impression that, to give a persuasive account of issue selection, we may need to move beyond these frameworks, and to engage with the psychological traits of those making the decisions. Whether or not this move is justified is the main subject of this dissertation.

In brief, I have argued that an expansion of issue coverage by INGOs, coupled with a general normative commitment to reducing harm and the indivisibility of rights, has produced a selection dilemma for decision-makers. INGO officials lack clearly ordered preferences and metrics to make comparisons among a pool of issue options that has markedly increased in its substantive diversity, precluding their ability to adjudicate between them in the formulation of their agenda. To resolve this dilemma, I posit that decision-makers employ a set of cognitive heuristics which allow them to bridge the gap between the selection dilemma and the exigencies of choosing issues for attention. My view is

[241] Murdie 2014.

that the heuristic-based account can build on and complement constructivist accounts focusing on the impact of norms, allowing us to connect a general normative orientation to do good and reduce harm with particular choice outcomes. To assess how this theory of selection fares against the evidence, we may now collate the findings from the case studies, before matching them with those of the survey experiment.

7.1 Collating Case Study Empirics

In line with the scope conditions of the theory, the selection dilemma appears to be a significant challenge faced by INGO officials in each of the case studies, one that is connected to the multidimensional issue space they face. In the human rights INGOs – AI and HRW – we can trace the development of selection problems to the evolution and growth of their perceived mission in the post-Cold War period. Having previously focused on a narrow set of civil and political rights, the 1990s coincided with the opening of political and geographic spaces and the end of stifling narratives around the Cold War, resulting in a re-evaluation of their remit. A seminal event in this period was the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights. The conference helped imbue INGOs with a broader conception of human rights and posited their indivisibility. A former Secretary General of AI who was privy to internal deliberations in the INGO in these years, and who was interviewed as part of this project, noted that this shift in perceived mandate was central to the selection dilemma: "in my day we had a defined mandate, but that has now been abandoned so that the question of selection becomes a major one" (Interview ID: A). This was a view shared across staff in both AI and HRW, who felt that selection choices were a recurring area of discussion, with no satisfactory solution in sight. In fact, illustrative of the salience of the selection dilemma, at the time of research both AI and HRW were in the process of an internal review which were, in part, designed to improve and systematize selection procedures.

Oxfam followed a slightly different trajectory. Oxfam's mission has been traditionally quite narrow, focused closely on the alleviation and reduction of poverty. On account of this focus, one might predict that selection is less of a challenge for the INGO, as the substantive difference between issue areas – a major problem for human rights groups – may be less marked. However, this is not what the empirical data shows. In the early 2000s, with the adoption of the three-year plan entitled *Toward Global Equity: Strategic Plan 2001-2004*, Oxfam moved to a rights-based approach to advocacy and relief work. Issues that one would not ordinarily associate with Oxfam, such as climate change and civil and political rights, became key aspects of their agenda. Moreover, officials within the INGO were adamant that selection was a major challenge for the group. A Deputy Director, who had previously worked at AI, argued that the selection dilemma was *worse* in Oxfam because the issue areas that could be connected to poverty were extensive and underspecified in comparison to human rights frameworks, which are more neatly categorized in international treaties and conventions. Another senior official corroborated this perspective, positing that in their eight years at Oxfam the question of issue selection was the most prevalent they had heard debated. Across each of the case studies, the selection dilemma has been, and continues to be, a serious challenge for decision-makers.

Turning to the theory itself, it generated predictions related to the organizational architecture and decisional process that underlies selection. The first concerns the production of information and how the level and sophistication of that process might inform choice outcomes. Again, we see similar problems arise in each of the case studies. Despite its longstanding prominence as a gatekeeper in the human rights field, HRW currently lacks a team tasked with monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Mechanisms of this sort have become commonplace in organizations across a variety of sectors and are viewed as critical to informed policy management. With INGOs specifically, these mechanisms may help with the construction of protocols and metrics for selecting future project work. Lacking such a division, decision-makers in HRW must arrive at policy outcomes without systematic knowledge of the quality and impact of previous work and, by extension, robust evidence as to the likely effects of subsequent choices. Further, until recently AI – despite a history stretching back to

the early 1960s – were also without a monitoring and evaluation division. Though at an incipient stage, the group has, in the past two years, hired staff to formulate coherent systems of monitoring, evaluation, and learning, which may aid future selection decisions. It remains to be seen what impact this move will have on selection – the division faces difficulties in finding metrics that recognize the context and individuality of different issue areas.

A similar problem has affected issue selection in Oxfam, though it manifests somewhat differently. In contrast to AI and HRW, Oxfam has invested a significant amount of resources and fostered the technical expertise required to produce meticulous monitoring and evaluation reports. Their impact evaluation reports are particularly sophisticated. At a field level, the INGO carries out periodic assessments of their work, which is then aggregated and integrated within an impact evaluation. The productivity of these activities, however, is undermined by severe problems with information management which prevent the right information arriving in the right hands when needed. Several Oxfam officials with knowledge of the INGO's internal systems noted that these inefficiencies were an impediment to organizational learning. This dysfunction could lead to multiple staff members in different parts of the INGO working on the same topic and requiring the same information, without being aware of it. In many instances, because Oxfam publish their reports online, it is easier for staff to conduct a Google search for necessary information rather than go through their own systems. Evidently, the production of quality information is a necessary but not sufficient factor for learning competencies and providing a reliable foundation for selection choices. Without proper methods of diffusion, informational constraints may still undermine attempts to systematize procedures and logics of selection. Of course, as noted in the theoretical framework, the absence of reliable information is not integral to the emergence of the selection dilemma – nor would the presence of good information be sufficient to surmount it – which arises as a result of an ambiguous normative orientation on the part of INGOs, a multidimensional issue space, and a lack of ordered preferences. However, this said, informational constraints surrounding issues in terms of monitoring, evaluation, and organizational learning may exacerbate the problem, and are worth noting on this basis.

The second theoretical expectation around decisional procedures concerned the role of individuals in the selection process. As anticipated, though with some exception, individuals appear to play an important role in issue selection across each case study, suggesting that, irrespective of organizational structure or type, key decision-makers help to shape choice outcomes. In AI, for instance, despite a democratic ethos and significant global membership being integrated within decision-making procedures, we can identify clear indications that individuals are central to selection. Tellingly, several senior staff with decades of experience within AI, both in the US and UK offices, cautioned against taking the architecture of the INGO too seriously. To their mind, trends in issue selection were pursued largely independently of seemingly perpetual shifts in the organizational structure. Similarly, in HRW – a much smaller INGO, with around 400 staff globally – considerable authority appears to be vested in the directors of regional units, as well as in thematic divisions in the program side of the INGO. From a pragmatic perspective this makes sense, expertise requires localized knowledge both in terms of geography and thematic substance. A comparatively small, global organization may naturally defer to the expertise of experienced staff who are better placed to determine where the INGO's focus should lie within the remit of their division.

Individuals seem to be situated somewhat differently in Oxfam. As one senior policy advisor put it, multiple layers of veto powers may leave some junior staff feeling that they have very little say in selection choices. Oxfam is a remarkably complex INGO, organized around a confederation that affords its constituent entities high levels of autonomy. Complicating matters further, practical and informal modes of working appear to be decoupled from official structures – a management figure involved in advocacy and communications lamented that, despite asking on numerous occasions, they were unable to procure an organigram to understand how decision-making power and accountability mechanisms were distributed. However, there was quite uniform consensus among those interviewed at Oxfam that individuals still have a sizeable effect on selection. Once initial proposals are made, there was a strong sense that a certain category of official – typically members of senior management who have been working there for over 15 years – wields undue influence. The

"veterans", as they were categorized by staff, reserve the authority to re-evaluate and refine proposals for actions in line with their own preferences. When proposals are agreed and actualized, they may end up looking quite different than those which more junior staff advocated for. As a consequence, many staff at lower and mid-levels of the INGO feel disempowered when it comes to agenda-setting, highlight problems with transparency, and posit the role of a coterie of senior personalities in determining the direction of Oxfam. Although the affect of individual personalities seems to have diminished over time – a consequence of increasing profressionalism – it continues to be a notable aspect of the selection process and, as one senior consultant in Oxfam USA argued, this is perhaps inevitable and likely to remain the case for the foreseeable future.

Prior to presenting a collated assessment of the motivational logics that drive selection, we may briefly pause to consider how each of the above elements stack up with the empirical data. We may first remark on the consistency of the cases with the scope conditions outlined in Section 2.3. It is not only the case that each of these organizations possess a multi-mandate agenda, but also – less verifiable in advance of the collection of empirical data – it is clear that INGO decision-makers face the expected selection dilemma. The selection dilemma is a recurring challenge for each of the INGOs, regardless of their substantive focus, organizational ethos or structure, and historical trajectory. Even in Oxfam, where a priori predictions surrounding the selection dilemma were more pessimistic – it was not a foregone conclusion that the dilemma was present – the evidence was unambiguous; questions of how to prioritise work and choose between candidate issues pervade the working environment and were a major concern for staff. Each of the cases therefore fit with the scope conditions for the theory.

In respect of the theoretical expectations, the prediction that officials typically lack reliable metrics and information, and that individual decision-makers may play an important role in the generation of issue rankings, all appear to map well with empirical realities. , . It was apparent that staff do not possess sophisticated information or metrics in their efforts to adjudicate between candidate issues. While HRW currently do not possess a team that produces this kind of data, AI has just begun

building its monitoring, evaluating, and learning capacities. Oxfam, on the other hand, produce relatively sophisticated reports on their work in the field, as well as reflective aggregate reports on impact. However, due to internal dysfunctions with information management and knowledge diffusion, the result is much the same as in AI and HRW. Oxfam officials often go without valuable data that would provide a more coherent foundation on which to inform selection choices.

In each of the three cases it was also apparent that, independent of organizational complexity and structures, the views of influential individuals weigh on policy outcomes. This may be due to a culture of deference to expertise, the thin spread of senior staff globally, or merely procedures of selection that tend to privilege the views of senior management who occupy positions of power. Whatever its origins, and with some exceptions – we should not underestimate the role of constraints such as the membership in AI – key decision-makers do appear to affect issue outcomes. Taken in conjunction, each of the cases appear consistent with the scope conditions of the theory and, when it comes to theoretical expectations, such as the absence of good information and the key role of individual officials, these appear to conform quite well with what we observe empirically.

7.2 Qualitative Evidence on the Determinants of Issue Selection

To properly contextualize the qualitative findings, we must acknowledge the time-sensitivity and further scope conditions of the research. When interpreting the performance of the theory, a number of elements of time contingency are pertinent. As noted, issue coverage by INGOs began to expand rapidly in the 1990s, and it is not a coincidence this pattern coincided with changes in the international political system. Although heuristics may be relevant to decision-making in this period, it is likely that explanations for this shift in coverage – which includes significant acts of prioritisation, such as embedding thematic divisions in the organizational anatomy of INGOs – are better grounded in the variation of structural factors in the their operational environment. In addition, how each group conceives of its own mission has undergone significant changes in the past

three decades and continues to be subject to debate. The organizational structures, methods of deliberation, and (in)formal selection criteria that underpin issue priorities should be conceived as dynamic processes rather than static phenomena. It is outside the scope conditions of the theory to explain the major changes we see in INGO behaviour in the 1990s. Rather, the applicability of the theory arises once the expansion of coverage has taken place, a process which has produced and continues to exacerbate the selection dilemma.

The political context in which the research was conducted warrants comment. Events external to the INGO, such as the rise of right-wing authoritarianism in the previous five years, appears to have re-orientated their behaviour and priorities. Since the election of US President Donald Trump, for example, officials at Oxfam USA found access to policymakers limited, closing off their usual avenues for advocacy at government level. Similarly, this change led AI and HRW officials to adopt a defensive posture toward issue selection, preferring to defend extant rights in areas such as immigration rather than expand the scope of their agenda. Central features of the trend toward authoritarianism, such as its association with breaches of civil and political rights, have meant that issues under that rubric have gained new salience for decision-makers. Furthermore, in the case of Oxfam specifically, singular incidents such as the scandal in Haiti are important to understand recent negative shifts in the availability of resources – including severed relationships with partners and government funding agencies – and downstream effects on the breadth of issues the INGO is capable of working on. As such, it is important to acknowledge how each of these contextual factors may help to shape the data generation process, and thus our interpretation of findings. Nonetheless, where possible I have endeavoured – through the interviews and use of documentary evidence – to engage with time-contingency in decision-makers' reasoning, as well as to bring to light the primary reasons for action which recur in selection choices.

Having acknowledged the context of the research, we may proceed to evaluating the case study evidence. While we have established that individual officials are prominent in the selection process, and that decision-making ordinarily takes place in the absence of quality information, it is another

matter as to whether such psychological mechanisms impacted choice outcomes. We may now take each heuristic in turn to assess their observable implications against the evidence in the three cases.

How did the qualitative evidence align with use of the availability heuristic? Taken together, it appears that there is empirical support – albeit mixed – for the effects of availability. Rather than re-capitulate the evidence in its entirety, we may examine instructive excerpts. When we look to Amnesty International's recent adoption of the issue of gun violence in the US, for example, an issue traditionally outside its purview, the vividness of the harm being caused by guns appears to have been a major factor in selection. The spectre of mass shootings at schools and concerts, as well as the prison-like securitization of schools, may have helped sway decision-makers to take the issue on. We can observe a similar logic at play in HRW's approach to environmental issues, as well as their response to the policies of President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte. On the environment, HRW's approach is instructive given the topic is not as immediately associable with egregious suffering as issues such as torture, killings, or arms trafficking. And yet, the opening of the group's executive overview of the issue refers to the "intimidation, legal harassment and deadly violence" that may be faced by environmental activists (HRW 2019). That environmental issues were eminently linked to extreme abuses of physical integrity rights suggests the prominence of this concern in the minds of decision-makers. In a similar vein, the rapid escalation of attention paid to President Duterte, in light of his perpetration of state violence under the auspices of a drug war – a series of human rights abuses officials regarded as "too egregious" to ignore – further suggests that vivid forms of human suffering is an important factor. In HRW's training materials for staff, another source of evidence in the documentary record, we see that "the gravity" of an issue is a key dimension of their thinking, which includes not only the scale of the problem (the number of lives affected), but also its nature (is the nature of the abuse violent, discriminatory, exploitative etc.). When the suffering of victims is vivid or acute this appears to move the needle towards selection.

Even for an INGO like Oxfam, primarily focused on poverty alleviation, vivid physical suffering appears to be of causal import. This is illustrated by a major investigation into abuses in Latin

America, resulting in a report entitled: *El Riesgo de Defender*. In the report, Oxfam sought to highlight "murders, attacks, and acts of repression against human rights activists in Latin America."[242] Informants from Oxfam also posited the importance of protecting individuals on the ground in developing countries, such as those within their INGO network. If adopting a policy or releasing a statement may result in a backlash by a repressive government, and this the endangerment of colleagues or vulnerable communities, it is more than likely that Oxfam would pass over the issue until a later date. Acute forms of physical suffering may therefore be surprisingly salient in Oxfam, regardless of its general focus on poverty reduction.

On the other hand, the case studies also revealed limitations in the explanatory power of the availability heuristic. One of the most violent episodes over the past decade, the civil war in Syria, was initially overlooked by Oxfam on the basis that the issue appeared well covered by other actors in the humanitarian network. And while they subsequently re-adjusted this policy choice as the scale of the conflict grew, we may infer from this response that sudden and acute violence was not solely sufficient to move the INGO toward selection. In the paired comparison of the (non-)selection of issues by HRW, we observe that attacks on education were prioritized in part due to the arresting notion of violence being perpetrated around or against children. But the negative instance of selection, child sex trafficking, may *also* involve significant physical harm to children. Perceptions of vivid suffering does not appear to be the operative variable that determined these diverging choice outcomes. Moreover, in examples that do speak to the influence of availability, as with AI's selection of gun control, the heuristic did not appear to work in isolation. Informants involved in the decision noted that adoption of gun control was also viewed as a means to elicit more support in new demographics. The evidence therefore suggests that while availability may increase the probability of selection, its effect appears far from determinate, and causal pathways leading to selection tend to be configurational.

[242] https://www.oxfam.org/fr/node/10600

How does the evidence match with the observable implications of the representative heuristic? Here, the case studies suggested the heuristic may well contribute to selection outcomes. As we have already established, all three INGOs under examination attempted to learn from past cases, though this was done – as anticipated by the theory – in a haphazard manner under quite severe informational constraints. In both AI and HRW, informants conveyed that while comparison to past events was a feature of the selection process, its implementation was largely informal and left to the individual discretion of senior staff who led thematic and regional teams. Neither group possess sophisticated mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation – AI are now attempting to build up these competencies, while they remain absent in HRW. In Oxfam, while informants affirmed that "we do have those learning conversations", and that the production of knowledge for making comparisons to the past cases was more systematic, dysfunctions arose in information management that impeded learning (Interview ID: F). These institutional factors appear consistent with what we would predict if officials employ the representative heuristic.

More specifically, we can observe the role of representativeness in the analogous reasoning utilized by staff during the ranking generation process. With Oxfam, this is apparent in officials' use of the arms trade treaty as a reference frame for contemporary debates surrounding issue adoption. Since 2003, the INGO agitated for a treaty "that would regulate the international trade in conventional weapons."[243] After undergoing multiple failures, including at the 2012 UN Conference in New York, the treaty eventually entered into force in 2014.[244] Viewed as a successful example of advocacy, a management official in Oxfam GB delineated how the arms trade treaty was invoked frequently among staff and "is quite a favourite" case to return to when formulating priorities (Interview ID: A1). The use of a singular, prominent example such as the arms trade treaty to inform decision-making across a host of candidate issues, is consistent with the operation of the representative heuristic. As behavioural decision research on the heuristic suggests, classifying issue options within

[243] https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-abc-of-the-arms-trade-treaty-why-its-important-how-will-it-work-230398
[244] https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CN/2014/CN.630.2014-Eng.pdf

the context of the arms treaty – a particular thematic area which saw success under specific conditions – and drawing analogies between them may serve to neglect important contextual variables.

In addition, we can see evidence of similar reasoning strategies employed by AI staff. In deliberations surrounding a prospective policy on the decriminalization of sex work, decision-makers expressly drew on analogies to issues deemed within the same parent class. Central to selection was AI's knowledge of the relationship between criminalization of LGBTI communities and increases in police violence. An AI advisor who was familiar with the internal debates around sex workers rights noted: "We increasingly realized that criminalization of same-sex relationships was leading to police violence…and there were massive parallels with sex workers".[245] The official explained that, by contextualizing sex work within the parameters of police violence and other forms of egregious violence, such as torture, the issue began to gain salience among staff. Again, the evidence suggests that analogies to seminal past cases contributed to a heightened assessment of the risks posed to affected individuals, in this instance sex workers, and ultimately tipped the balance toward selection.

We may also acknowledge some limitations of explanations which appeal to representativeness and the use of analogies. We can observe such limits in the paired comparison of issues in the HRW chapter, where decision-makers chose not to work on issues of child sex trafficking. While it appears analogies were used in reference to the positive case, attacks on education, there was no shortage of historical examples of sexual violence and trafficking for HRW researchers to appeal to during internal deliberations, yet this failed to motivate selection. To understand the application of the representative heuristic and its explanatory strength for selection, we may need to further explore the conditions under which analogies are deployed and when they are not in instances which appear readily amenable to this reasoning in this manner.

[245] Interview ID: T.

Lastly, what does the qualitative data suggest with respect to the affect heuristic? Across each of the cases, we see considerable evidence that affective response to issues may impact issue outcomes. Within AI, an official who works across a number of divisions, and thus has a unique vantage point to assess the motivations of a multiplicity of staff, posited – without probing – that a primary factor in selection was a personal connection between staff and the issues they desired to work on. The director explained motivations as follows, which is worth quoting again:

> "There's a lot of people that feel strongly about an issue that might be very personal to them. They might have a story [involving a particular issue]. Human rights tends to be something that is so personal. I think anyone joining a human rights organization, sometimes you know, they have a story behind why they want to do the work that they're doing. It is usually not 'I want to work at Amnesty because it is Amnesty', they usually have a very strong connection to it".[246]

As this was the first point of motivation the official raised, and was stated without probing, it appears to be a credible expression of their views. This sentiment was echoed by a longstanding official in Oxfam, with almost ten years' service to the INGO, who spoke to the characteristics of staff members: "Most, or a lot of, people who work in Oxfam are ideologically and cause driven. A lot of that bears out in… almost all of us work too much. It also means the stakes are very high for us in [internal] strategic negotiations. It feels like their life's work is up for grabs" (Interview ID: X). An executive member and former head of division at HRW had a similar perspective, suggesting that the personal backgrounds of staff members could have a significant bearing on the issues which animated them. What seems apparent, and as these perspectives illustrate, is that many INGO workers feel deep personal investment in their jobs, and that their own ideological and ethical convictions – in part derived from their personal experiences – may exert influence over their preferences for selection. As explicated by the same Oxfam official, this may be because staff

[246] Interview ID: O.

members who are personally invested in an issue are often well-placed to take advantage of opportunities that arise to advance their cause of interest:

> "With some people, the willingness to keep plugging away at what your passion area is when no-one is paying attention. Even when you've been told it is not the organizational priority. That it's not going to make a difference. That we're not working on that anymore and you should focus on this other thing. The people who stay with it, plug away, maintain their network, and do it on the side because it's what they care about most in the world, are often very well positioned because strategies ebb and flow and moments present themselves for that type of expertise" (Interview ID: X).

To see how this applies in practice, we see a persuasive example for the potential use of the affect heuristic in HRW's decision not to choose to adopt child sex trafficking within their agenda. When one senior official in the children's rights division was asked why the issue had not received attention from the group, after a pause they replied that "there is no good reason why" (Interview ID: I). This is insightful, because although post-hoc rationalizations are often attached to heuristic-led judgment, the concession that there appears to have been no considered reason for the issue to be overlooked may be particularly suggestive of the use of heuristics. Further, a divisional leader who oversaw internal discussions on child sex trafficking stated that "if a researcher wanted to work on it, we might find a way to do it" (Interview ID: J). What this indicates is the contingent nature of selection, whereby the difference between an issue being incorporated within an INGOs agenda could be no more than the convictions of an individual staff member. Although that factor was present in the case of attacks on education, it was absent for child sex trafficking. This episode therefore appears suggestive of the role of affective response in choice outcomes.

Another instructive instance is the response of Oxfam to the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Oxfam had previously decided to focus its attention on the areas of women, water, and work. Despite its downgrading by the group, a staff member who felt dedicated to health policy continued to work in that area. The health policy advisor retained organizational competencies on health issues, allowing

the INGO to respond effectively when the Covid-19 crisis arose, "when Covid struck, she is now the most important and powerful voice within the organization in our Covid response" (Interview ID: X). This is an especially important role, as almost all of Oxfam's current work is in some way indexed against what is happening with Covid-19. As this episode illustrates, the determination of an individual official to push forward on an issue that had lost salience across the organization ultimately had a considerable bearing on Oxfam's activities, and put that figure at the forefront of the selection process.

Of course, it would be reductionist to suggest that the emotional responses to key staff members was sufficient to explain variation in patterns of selection. Inevitably, there are INGO officials who push for adoption of issues but fail to convince colleagues that it is the optimal way forward, at least initially. The empirical evidence does, however, seem to support the claim that INGO staff includes individuals who are driven by strong convictions that relate to particular issue areas, that the "activists" often wield sway during the selection process, and that the affect heuristic may contribute to decision-making.

In terms of alternative factors, one of the most commonly cited criteria for selection in the case studies was the probability of achieving impact. Across each of the INGOs, a desire for impact was raised, without probing, by almost all informants. It was also a consistent feature of the documentary record, appear in training materials and templates for think-ins on selection. Specific reports were also published annually to make internal assessments, and to demonstrate to external constituencies, as to how much impact the INGO had achieved in the previous 12 months. From its pervasive appearance across different forms of evidence, and the fact informants routinely raised it without any kind of probing, we can reliably infer the importance of this factor in each of the cases. In fact, the uniformity of agreement on the significance of impact in decision-making on selection seems to be suitable grounds to suggest it is a critical criterion within the broader population of INGOs. Of course, as with any causal factor, there are exceptions. Several informants intimated that their organization was perfectly willing to apply a "walk in the wilderness" approach, where the moral

righteousness of the issue means it warrants attention irrespective of the likelihood of impact. Each of the cases – AI (death penalty), Oxfam (pharmaceutical companies), HRW (China and Tibet) – worked on issues that officials recognized had very little chance of substantive change. Moreover, we cannot assume that, because INGO officials were concerned with impact, that this reflects a particular motivational logic. One might argue that aiming to bring about impact is a derivation of ethical concern, has utility for enhancing organizational reputation and procuring donor funding moving forward, or that motives are some both ethical and strategic in nature. In any event, as one of the underlying assumptions of the theory was that INGO decision-makers are motivated to lessen human harm, the empirical evidence showing that the causal import of impact is congruent with our theoretical expectations.

Related to this, another primary consideration for officials which held across the three cases was the question of added value. In the paired, within-case analysis in the case of AI, a key difference in officials' decision to tackle the decriminalization of sex work, and to overlook issues associated with textile workers, was perceptions that AI's added value to the latter issue would be limited. An official directly involved in the decision not to work on the abuse of workers' rights in textiles explained their decision: "…there are so many NGOs in the textiles space. Not just NGOs, but really great NGOS…We have to ask what our added value is and make the decision on what is the best use of our resources" (Interview ID: S). We see this logic replicated in both HRW and Oxfam. For instance, when an informant from the children's rights division of HRW was asked why the unit decided not to adopt child sex trafficking as an issue, they summarized their thinking as follows: "if these other groups are working on it, do we want to make it one of our five priorities?...we go where we can make the biggest contribution" (Interview ID: J). Similarly, numerous officials in Oxfam, without probing, cited the contribution of added value as one of the main criteria that affects their choices. However, despite this apparent strength of the evidence for the explanatory potential of this variable, it is not the entire story. "Added value" may be a double-edged sword, of which decision-makers have some conflicting views. Several senior officials posited that their INGO often had the best

opportunity to bring about impact when they were working as part of a strong network of organizations. They therefore face a predicament in respect of selection. They have the option of shining a light on issues that are overlooked by other groups, and for which they may then contributed the most added value in absolute terms, or they may work with partner organizations as part of a network to build substantial pressure for policy change. Informants in each INGO had ambivalent feelings about which approach was optimal. In practice, they appear to adopt both strategies, depending on the preferences and judgments of the decision-maker.

A prospective causal factor with which we see divergence between the cases studies is regarding the role of donors. In interviews with AI officials, at no point was the issue of donors raised without probing. This appears to be a derivation of AI's membership-based structure – a formidable source of income for the INGO – and the procurement of unrestricted funding. Because almost all of AI's funding is unrestricted, officials have discretion to allocate resources to issues of their choosing. On the other hand, donors were a more recurring theme in conversations with HRW staff, where the subject was raised voluntarily – itself an indication that donors are a more salient consideration for them. Funding that is designated or restricted, that is money that has conditions attached to it on where it must be spent, is more common in HRW. Although officials engage with the donor – often holding detailed discussions in advance of a financial contribution – and try to steer them towards HRW's preferred area of investment, the inclination of the donor is certainly of consequence. This said, it is very rare for donor funding to materialize a new issue on the agenda for HRW. Conversely, that funding tends to lead to the extension of program work that is pre-selected in some capacity.

With Oxfam the effect of donors may be more direct. One official put it starkly, lamenting that, at times, they felt that the INGO may be regarded as the "implementation arm" of the major donors, such as the European Union and the governments of Germany, Sweden, and Ireland. Again, while officials may try to sway the donors to align with Oxfam's judgments of where and how the money should be spent, the parameters of the spending are often set in advance. This is emblematic of the typical relationship between Oxfam and large donors when it comes to service delivery and aid

projects. However, we also see important within-case variation. In terms of advocacy, campaigning, and communication work, which encompasses a broader spectrum of issue areas than service delivery and aid – Oxfam may engage in advocacy on an issue that they never provide services for – the role of donors appears quite marginal. Large donors are less interested in these forms of work, and Oxfam may rely on general donations to fund it. Small, general donors tend not to take a great interest, or make demands on, the specifics of how this money is spent. What this suggests is that the impact of donors may shift, depending on the mode of operation of the INGO. The more it is orientated toward building capacities and providing relief on the ground, the larger part donors may occupy in determining issue choices. Overall, across each of the case studies, donors appear causally relevant but are in no way dominant in selection. Their influence appears to vary quite dramatically depending on the kind of work they engage in, as well as the availability of alternative sources of funding, such as unrestricted financing garnered from a membership or supporter base.

The distinction we see between cases – AI and HRW on one hand, Oxfam on the other – regarding donors also appears, to an extent, to hold in the case of media effects. Patterns of selection exhibited by both AI and HRW appear to suggest a relative insensitivity to media coverage. In the case of AI, for example, its work on oil spills in the Niger Delta, which affects extremely marginalized and unrepresented groups, and attracts negligible international media attention, appears to confound the prospective agenda-setting effects of the media. This is also true of AI's advocacy for the the Sengwer people in the Embobut Forest in Kenya. Moreover, it appears to apply over time, as AI have remained steadfast in their opposition to the death penalty despite very little uptake by the press. Similarly, there was little empirical evidence that media attention had a causal effect on HRW's agenda. HRW have invested substantial time and resources to investigate and report on on issues with almost no media coverage, such as pesticide poisoning in rural Brazil, or the practice of shackling on Ghana and Indonesia. Senior staff posited that the causal direction of the INGOs relationship with the media was, in fact, the opposite. They retained close contact with journalists to push and frame stories to align with HRW's agenda, often providing research and evidence to the

media. Reflecting on this relationship, several officials lamented that the organization was too unresponsive to media narratives, and that they must do more to be in sync with what stories the media is pushing.

Staff in Oxfam believed that the media could sway decision-making in the INGO. "It would be naïve not to think it has an effect…the media plays an agenda-setting function no matter who you are", remarked a senior member of management in Oxfam GB (Interview ID: X). When asked directly about whether the media could influence decision-making in Oxfam, an official who works directly with public communications answered candidly, without probing; "Yes they do. They can sway us. If an issue is covered in the media we can leverage more capacity from colleagues…We already have the policy line, so it sways us to a certain extent" (Interview ID: A1). It is one question as to whether the media can determine aspects of Oxfam's behaviour – it appears that it does. However, it is another as to whether media effects exact influence in the domain of selection. Here the evidence is more ambiguous. While some figures believe that the media was a consideration in selection, others believed that this was only a minor factor. In the view of the latter group, issues are usually selected prior to assessments of media activity. The media, then, might influence how much resources are subsequently dedicated to a certain issue area – though other factors, such as the availability of unrestricted resources, are important – but appear to have less of a say in whether Oxfam will adopt the issue for attention in the first instance.

Having acknowledged these alternative factors, how might we assess the theory, and what conclusions can reach about the motivational logics of INGOs on the basis of the qualitative evidence? As we may be reminded, the crux of the theory is not whether a particular heuristic a particular heuristic is used or not, as these may be closely related, but the role of heuristic-led judgment in determining choice outcomes more generally. As such, an evaluation of the theory requires an aggregation of the data for and against each of the heuristics. Based on the evidence in the case studies, and briefly recapitulated in this section, we may conclude that the empirics provide support for various aspects of the theory. The theoretical foundations of the proposed framework,

such as its claims about the role of key decision-makers in shaping outcomes, and the underlying motivations on the part of officials to lessen human harm, all appear to be strongly corroborated across all three cases. When it comes to the reasons for action which drive decision-making, we may observe numerous examples, both arising from interviews and data garnered from the documentary record, that cognitive heuristics impact selection. This is the case across each case study, each encompassing quite distinct organizational structures, suggesting the transferability of findings to different institutional contexts and decision-making environments. However, it is also apparent that these factors are not determinate. Factors such as issue coverage within the broader INGO network, probability judgments of achieving impact, and – depending on the nature of the organization and its mode of operation – the behaviour of external actors such as media and donors may also be of causal relevance.

7.3 Matching Experimental Findings

Whereas the qualitative aspect of the research design was conducive to situating INGO officials within their decisional context, allowing analysis across organizational levels and to assess both internal and external factors, the survey experiment evaluated individual responses to choice tasks and confers alternative analytical advantages for causal inference. One of the main challenges for psychological approaches to IR is the difficulty of attributing causal effects to psychological mechanisms using observational data. To alleviate this problem, and as part of the additive MM strategy employed in this study, the conjoint experiment acts as a supplementary tool to augment findings from the core analysis, evaluating the micro-foundational claims of the theory at the individual level. We may briefly remark on the experimental findings and match them with those of the case studies.

The conjoint analysis allowed for the neat separation of causal factors and for the construction of hypotheses pertaining to each heuristic. In terms of comparison across methods, the results of the

experiment appear, in general though not exclusively, to re-affirm those of the case study. In the conjoint analysis we see that the nature of the threat to victims – whether it involves risk of violent killing or they require humanitarian aid – appears to be an important consideration for officials. An issue was much (18.5 percentage points) more likely to be chosen for attention in the presence of a violent threat, suggesting that vivid and evocative forms of suffering increase officials' propensity for selection. We therefore see strong evidence for use of the availability heuristic in decision-making in the experiment, corroborating findings from the case studies. With regard to the representative heuristic, the results also find a sizable and significant effect of the corresponding attribute, that is whether or not subjects were treated so that the issue had similarities to the Syrian crises. This finding suggests that if an issue appears comparable to events surrounding a major and recent humanitarian crisis, it is 12.3% (SE=0.02) more likely to be selected. This finding is particularly notable given that, key potential confounders were controlled for in the conjoint design, such as the nature of the issue, the humanitarian scale in terms of lives at risk, and opportunity for policy impact. Having controlled for these background factors, we can be reasonably confident that the treatment of perceived similarities to Syria had a causal effect.

On the other hand, we see no evidence in the experiment for the affect heuristic. We may recall that one potential aspect of the affect heuristic is an increased, positive emotional response on the part of INGO officials to victims who share key characteristics with them. However, in the conjoint analysis the identity of the victim group, operationalized in terms of their attitudes toward democracy, does not have a significant effect on the probability of selection. There are several potential explanations for this result. For normative or instrumental reasons – or a combination of both – decision-makers may not want to take sides in a humanitarian crisis. To do so may raise ethical qualms at the core of their humanitarian work, or invite accusations of partiality which could damage an INGO's reputation and undermine their work, both in terms of future support and access to important actors or research sites. Another possibility is that being in favour of democracy was not a salient consideration for officials and was insufficient to alter their preferences. Moreover, one limitation of

the survey experiment is the requirement for the disaggregation and precise operationalization of attributes, relative to our ability to explore the multi-faceted nature of variables in the case studies. Illustrating this challenge, the affect heuristic may also be operationalized in terms of the personal attachments to issues which officials feel based on their own experiences. Indeed, it was this dimension of affect, rather than discrepant patterns of empathy to contrasting victim groups, which the case study research found evidence for. It may well be that the negative finding in the experiment is an artefact of the choice of operationalization.

Corroborating the findings from the case studies further, both the likelihood of achieving impact and the severity of the crisis in terms of the lives at risk produced significant results. The effect sizes in both instances were large, with an 80% probability of impact (baseline 20%) increasing the chances of selection by 30%, and 25,000 lives being at risk (baseline 200) making an issue 39% more likely to be selected. Although these attributes do not relate to the heuristics directly, they are consistent with the expectations of theory, based on its assumption that INGO officials are motivated to lessen harm. Plus, where probabilities are quantified in an experiment of this kind – all other attributes were expressed in qualitative terms – and the likely outcomes of a given choice are clear, it is logical that these attributes would result in a significant and sizeable effect.

At this juncture, we may acknowledge a limitation in the comparison between the case studies and experiment. This not only relates to inconsistency in operationalization and the number of factors which may be evaluated using both techniques – there is a limit to the amount of attribute combinations we may include without encountering issues of statistical power – but also the subject pool in the experiment. As described above, it appears that while issue selection in AI and HRW followed relatively similar patterns, Oxfam, due to its thematic focus on poverty and participation in service delivery and emergency relief, may operate according to a slightly different logic at times. For example, there is little doubt that donors play much more of a role in project delivery on the ground for Oxfam than it does for the other case studies, which are primarily advocacy groups. Given that the subject pool in the experiment is restricted to staff from AI and HRW, it is plausible that

including staff from INGOs who, in their day-to-day activities, are more engaged with service delivery and procuring funding from donors, the experiment may have produced different results. Future scholarship may benefit from exploring the implications of these distinct modes of operation for selection choices in an experimental setting.

7.4 Significance of the Research

The first contribution of the study relates to the empirical identification and conceptualization of the selection dilemma facing INGOs. Although issue selection has been discussed by IR scholars, little has been written on its origins in history or of its conceptual underpinning. The present research provides historical analysis of each case study, charting the emergence and development of the selection dilemma within each case. In addition to this empirical grounding, the study provides a conceptual framework for understanding the selection dilemma that arose, connecting this to a proliferation of issue coverage – beginning largely in the 1990s – and a corresponding increase in the substantive difference between issues within the perceived missions of INGOs. In the presence of a general but ambiguous normative orientation, as well as acommitment to the indivisibility of human rights, problems of selection were exacerbated by the expansion of issue coverage. Identifying the origins of the selection problem – similar across each of the cases, irrespective of internal structure and substantive focus – and providing a conceptual framework to understand its character, is a key contribution of this project.

The theoretical and empirical contribution must be contextualized within the growth of scholarship investigating non-state actors in international politics. According to this literature, non-state humanitarian actors may be regarded as a "second superpower" in international relations. The perhaps overly excited nature of this claim aside, it is abundantly clear that humanitarian networks now wield significant influence in global politics. They are estimated to administer more aid in the developing world than the United Nations or World Bank. In the realm of advocacy, TANs and

INGOs are integral players in the certification of new human rights, contribute vital resources, legitimacy, and public outreach to humanitarian causes, and mobilize for the adoption of human rights norms by state decision-makers (Murdie 2014). Given their proliferation and rising influence, understanding how INGOs form their agenda has important implications. As such, the primary contribution of this study is that it is the first to outline a theory of decision-making – not merely selection – with regard to issue selection in INGOs, building on a number of preliminary studies that have broached the topic but have yet to delineate a coherent theory.

The thesis is also the first to investigate micro-foundations, while also imputing alternative ones grounded in psychology. The findings of the study – showing empirical support for the effects of heuristic-led judgment – challenge the motivational assumptions and conclusions of dominant IR paradigms in their application to INGOs, build on calls for analytical eclecticism to properly understand humanitarian behaviour,[247] help to resolve empirical puzzles associated with selection, and offer empirically-grounded claims to guide future work in this research agenda. More specifically, the thesis challenges the explanatory value of theories which, in various ways, emphasise organizational self-interest as the primary driver of decision-making. Whether existing scholarship highlights factors associated with the organizational climate of INGOs, such as competitive and financial pressures, or features and dynamics internal to groups, the evidence appears to conflict with the idea that selection is largely a function of INGOs pursuing their own self-interest. On the other hand, the argument complements rather than contravenes key precepts of theories focused on the role of norms in choice outcomes. Regarding the constructivist work in this area, the thesis adds to this literature by identifying points of weakness in current studies – suggesting such explanations may be incomplete in their account of selection – while also building on insights about norms, which I posit may shape the perceptions and orientations of officials. Heuristic-led judgment may help to connect a general orientation to do good on the part of INGOs with the patterns of selection which we observe empirically.

[247] Murdie 2014.

The findings may also speak to related literatures in IR. Gaining an understanding of how the cognitive perception of issues affects issue selection may provide useful insights for scholars engaged in on-going debates concerning the role of media effects in political judgement formation in respect of humanitarian issues (Jakobsen 1996; Livingston 1997). They may also have more general use for scholars seeking to understand the role of psychological processes in political, organizational, and network-based decision-making. In addition, the project may contribute to a broader debate concerning why issues gain traction and norms emerge in international politics. Failure to provide a convincing account of norm emergence is a criticism which has typically been levelled at constructivist IR scholars. This research agenda may be advanced by the picture of INGO behaviour provided in this study, with issue selection a logically preceding step to norm emergence (see: Goldgeier and Tetlock 2001; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

The project also breaks new ground in terms of its research design and methodology. It is novel in applying an additive mixed-method approach – including a dominant-less-dominant design – to explore issue selection at two levels of analysis: the individual and organizational level. It is the first study in this research program to combine qualitative and experimental approaches – introducing conjoint analysis – to data generation, and to field a survey experiment with staff in INGOs to assess the relative causal effects of multiple factors. As most experimental studies tend to rely on narrow sampling strategies, such as university students, this approach enhances external validity and allows reliable inferences to be made to the population of interest. It is hoped the MM framework employed here will prove valuable as a template for future designs as this area of inquiry advances.

The findings will be of consequence not only for academic debates, but also for how INGO officials consider the selection dilemma. Selection continues to be a pervasive and recurring challenge for policymakers. In each case study, at the time of research the INGOs were in the midst of discussions to help ameliorate the problem, and there was broad consensus among officials who were interviewed that the means of surmounting it remain elusive. This is no small problem. Ineffective allocation of resources limit organizational capacities, has a deleterious effect on humanitarian

outcomes, and may threaten the survival of INGOs. This research sheds light on the incentives present in INGOs' operational environment, as well as the traits of the decision-makers themselves, evaluating how these sets of factors may contribute to behaviour at the organizational level. By providing insights on the processes and factors that shape selection choices, one central project deliverable arising from the thesis is to allow INGOs to better inform decisional procedures and issue priorities.

7.5 Limitations

To properly consider the significance of the study and its findings, we must also identify, and explore the implications of, a number of limitations. As a rule, certain limitations arise by virtue of the finite nature of the project, and manifest in attempts to extrapolate beyond the analysis of a partial reality of INGO behaviour. One area in which limitations of this sort arise is with the case selection. The diverse spread and nature of INGOs, in terms of size, resources, mission, cultural ethos, and mode of operation, among other dimensions of variation, preclude truly representative sampling from the universe of cases. Each of the cases included in the analysis may be considered gatekeeper organizations and are, almost by definition, atypical of INGOs within their organizational field. By examining gatekeepers, the policy implications of the findings increase in importance. Analytically speaking, as well, the empirics may be considered more valuable as the activities of such groups tend to have downstream effects on issue uptake by other INGOs. The other side of the coin is that, as an unrepresentative sample, we cannot, on the basis of the findings, confidently infer the proposed theory of decision-making to INGOs that occupy a different role in the organizations field. While it is certainly plausible that selection functions in a similar way across the population of INGOs in the human rights and humanitarian sector – after all, we have seen that the selection problem manifests in a remarkably similar way across each of the cases, which are not uniform – we must acknowledge limits in how far we can transfer findings on the basis of this single study. As Seawright and Gerring (2008, p. 295) put it, "it is true that purposive methods cannot entirely overcome the inherent

unreliability of generalizing from small-N samples, but they can nonetheless make an important contribution to the inferential process…". The weakness of a partial examination of selection may be connected to its advantages, and vice versa.

Linked to case selection, we may identify two related issues. First, the paired-comparisons that contribute within-case analysis also required trade-offs in the research design. The decision to focus on issues that, in essence, had both made it through multiple organizational filters – one falling, one selected, at the final stage – may introduce bias. By neglecting the negative issues that did not make it to the point of active deliberation within each INGOs, the analysis potentially excludes certain logic of selection that do not leave as much empirical residue. The trade-off therefore appears to be one of observational bias as against the procurement of data on negative cases that may illustrate certain determinants of non-selection. Second, on account of the complexity of large INGOs such as AI, HRW, and Oxfam, the unit of observation is narrower than selection dynamics within the cases. Decisions on policy adoption, advocacy, campaigning, and service delivery, may encompass somewhat different considerations on the part of officials. In this study, focusing on policy adoption – a prior step to questions of prioritisation decisions in advocacy or campaigning – appears logical. However, we must also recognize that how we conceive of and operationalize selection, a process that may occur at different levels and in distinct parts of an INGO, may affect the results that are garnered.

We may flag similar limitations in respect of the conjoint analysis. The process of operationalization for the survey experiment required the formulation of "thin" concepts, and meant other potential options were excluded. For instance, the concept of affect has multiple possible implications for what decision-makers may respond to, and in what they respond. In the qualitative aspect of the study, this included the personal experience of officials with issue areas. In the experiment, this was restricted to the political identity of the victims and perceived similarities with the decision-maker. Equally, as with the case studies, the experiment raises issues of representativeness in the sampling procedure. Participants were confined to staff at AI and HRW, two human rights groups. In INGOs of this

kind, staff reference frames (e.g. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) may be different to those in Oxfam (the UDHR is not used in the same way) and other cases in the population. Of course, given that most experiments in the social and behavioural sciences rely on a narrow database of university students in Western democracies, having a subject pool of INGO decision-makers reaches a comparatively high evidentiary standard for causal inferences. And yet, we should also be cautious about extending the claims too far. As the first experiment of its kind, replication will be important to our ultimate assessments of the treatment effects, as will the extension of experimentation to INGO officials active in different areas of the humanitarian sector. For instance, INGO officials whose day-to-day activities are focused on the procurement and delivery of services on the ground may employ distinct reasoning strategies.

Given these limitations, it may be useful to again reflect on the theoretical argument advanced in the thesis. Here, we may briefly re-examine the theory in light of factors which appear germane to selection but may not have been explicitly or fully theorized, as well as to comment – in recognizing the thesis' limitations – on the status of the theory in terms of prospective refinements.

We may identify two main factors that were not explicitly or fully theorized in the thesis and, on the basis of their prominence in the empirics, may require further theoretical attention. One such factor is the role of impact in preference formation among INGO officials. In the qualitative component of the empirics, the data was quite clear that a desire for impact, conceived of as INGOs having a practical and substantial influence on outcomes in an issue domain, was a prevalent concern among officials. Similarly, the results of the conjoint experiment indicated that the likelihood of having impact was a primary driver of decision-making. Although not without its complications – the case study research unearthed many examples where INGOs worked on issues where officials acknowledged little prospect of success, e.g. HRW's work on China and Tibet – the evidence suggests the notion of impact may warrant more explicit theoretical attention and research. For instance, it may be the case that impact forms part of the normative orientation of decision-makers to want to do good and lessen harm. In this sense, concern for impact may be a manifestation of the

general normative impulse guiding INGO behaviour and which is consistent with precepts of the theory. Further, given that a key function of the three cognitive heuristics employed in the thesis relates to probability judgments and assessments of risks and future outcomes, heuristics may perform a critical role in determining issue choices based on a desire for impact, as they could aid decision-makers judgments as to where impact is likely. On the other hand, we might also distinguish between a general normative goal to do good and more pragmatic concerns which impact may represent. It is plausible that impact is, at least in part, important to INGOs because it allows them to make credible financial asks of donors, helps them in recruiting supporters, and bolsters their reputation. Demonstrating impact may be critical to each of these aims. If this is the case, we may connect the goal of impact to perceptions of organizational self-interest. With these possibilities in mind, the role of impact in determining issue selection merits further exploration and theorizing.

Another factor of note, currently lacking explicit theorizing in the thesis, is the existence of competencies or particular areas of expertise within INGOs. Both the qualitative and experimental data suggests that, when groups have a significant level of expertise on a set of issues, this will increase the prospect of those issues being selected. Of course, as we have established, there are certain limitations in explanations based on this factor. The case study evidence illustrates how INGOs have come to work on a plethora of issues which departed substantially from past agendas. Despite this, extant expertise was a recurring factor cited by interview informants and seemed to positively impact the prospects of issue selection in the experiment. As such, this aspect of selection may also warrant further engagement in future work. One way of doing this would be to consider the role of existing competencies in the broader context of processes of path dependency. The theoretical discussion in Section 2.3 explicates how the thesis' argument may be compatible with PD, as heuristics could provide the positive feedback loops necessary for emergent paths to be informed by prior activities. It may therefore prove fruitful to engage with the relationship between heuristics and PD more systematically in future research, while investigating how the existing competencies of

organizational members – a feature of organizations that may constrain later outcomes – may be integrated into these theoretical inquiries.

In addition to these areas of further exploration, the theory may be usefully refined and extended in other ways. For example, it would be valuable to more closely examine the distinction between human rights and humanitarian issues and INGOs. Both human rights and humanitarian work could follow different patterns of development and, to the extent they present different challenges for decision-makers, exhibit distinct processes of selection. In the empirics, two of the three case studies are human rights organizations and, while Oxfam has significant humanitarian dimensions to its work, it is guided by a rights-based framework. We therefore cannot be sure of the relative extent to which the theory applies to humanitarian issues and, as a consequence, must temper claims regarding these issue types and regard it as a prospective area of refinement in future work. Moreover, regarding building on the theory moving forward, the thesis outlines a general set of conditions under which heuristics may shape choice outcomes. Having delineated core theoretical propositions, a productive next step may be to conduct further investigation into the precise conditions, and kinds of choices, where heuristics may be more or less salient within the broader scope conditions of the theory. For instance, how might heuristics play a role in the formulation of strategic plans which span three to five-year periods? And to what extent do heuristics manifest in decisions taken in response to unexpected emergencies, when INGOs must act quickly? The research design in this thesis is not calibrated to specifically address questions of this kind, and future studies on this topic may shed important light on the entry points and impact of heuristics during processes of issue ranking, thus adding further layers of specification to the theoretical argument.

7.6 Directions for Future Research

We may identify a number of pathways for future research. These may be categorized in three main areas. Future inquiry may build on the study's findings, address weaknesses in the research design,

and pursue related areas beyond the scope of the present thesis. In light of Section 7.5, we may briefly highlight a number of limitations of the research that may be addressed in future work. This would involve extending the analysis to new cases, examining alternative operationalizations of key factors, and replication of current findings. In order to test for the generalizability of findings, it would be productive to broaden the case selection to include additional INGO types, including smaller INGOs for whom selection may pose a distinct challenge. Theorists may also investigate single-issue INGOs, where selection is critical in two respects: their initial formation – a selection decision of a different order to the problem analysed in this study – and the evolution of selection decisions over time. Moreover, combating observation bias through systematic analysis of issues *perceived* within INGO remits, including those that fail to pass through initial organizational filters, would contribute to a well-rounded research agenda. This will require examination of an earlier stage of the advocacy chain to explain how issues are not only incorporated within INGO agendas, but are also perceived and identified as falling within the remit of those bodies in the first instance. Lastly, matters of operationalization and replication are vital to assess the degree to which findings are robust or are an artefact of design decisions taken by the researcher.

One of the key findings in this study is the prominent role that other INGOs operating in the same sector play in the formation of officials' issue preferences. The study identified two, seemingly contradictory, patterns of INGO behaviour. On the one hand, if an issue is judged to be adequately covered by other bodies, officials may question whether they can contributed added value to the issue area and determine that their attention and resources are best directed toward issues that are not covered as comprehensively. On the other, decision-makers are aware that their work is often most effective when they are working in conjunction and in a sustained fashion with other groups. They may then pool resources and influence to deliver relief or bring about meaningful shifts in the behaviour of human rights abusers. In future work, it would be fruitful to evaluate the conditions under which issue coverage by actors within INGOs' organizational environment produce these two divergent responses, either increasing or diminishing probabilities of selection. Linked to this, as each

of the cases included in this study may be classified as gatekeeper INGOs, it is likely that their selection decisions have a significant downstream impact on patterns of prioritization by other groups. Endorsement by a gatekeeper – as with AI's policy on the decriminalization of sex work – may make other INGOs aware of an issue for the first time, add legitimation to an issue, or make it more salient in the human rights movement. Examining the network effects of issue adoption by major INGOs would therefore be an insightful area of inquiry.

At the centre of the theory advanced in this project are moral values, assessments, and action. As we have discussed, much of the literature on INGOs imputes laudable motives, positing that they are – at least – benign actors in the international system. When selecting issues, officials are engaged in a form of moral decision-making. These choices are embedded in an architecture of competing concerns, such as how to balance moral preferences with prevailing norms and strategic necessities for organizational survival. While the political psychology framework utilized in this project relies on experimental work from behaviour decision research, psychologists have also developed a burgeoning research program on moral psychology. Moral psychology is an interdisciplinary pursuit, often blending philosophy with psychology, and may be defined as "the study of human thought and behavior in ethical contexts".[248] In some ways, incorporating insights on the affect heuristic provides a bridge to this literature, as emotive intuitions appear linked to moral cognition (Greene 2014). Political scientists are only beginning to tap the potential application of moral psychology, which appears especially germane to issue selection. The field has highlighted "…the importance of moral intuitions, the socially functional (rather than truth-seeking) nature of moral thinking, and the coevolution of moral minds with cultural practices and institutions that create diverse moral communities" (Haidt 2007: 998). It seems probable that these tendencies have implications for how INGO officials, as part of a particular organizational field and environment, make ethical choices and trade-offs between competing issues of concern. Incorporating moral psychology in the debate on issue selection will almost certainly enrich our understanding of it.

[248] https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-psych-emp/

Another possibility is to go beyond the question of selection, and to investigate patterns of prioritization, as well as instances where issues are dropped by INGOs. Once an issue has been chosen, whether it be for program work, advocacy, or campaigning, officials face recurrent decisions as to how resources should be distributed among those selected. We currently do not possess much theoretical or empirical work which can help us to explain these shifts. Moreover, existing studies in this research domain have yet to broach the question of why issues disappear from INGO agendas. Once in place, there appears to be numerous institutional incentives – such as the development of organizational competencies and partner networks – to carry on with issues once selection. However, as officials confirmed in the present study, INGOs may choose to drop certain issues over time to focus attention elsewhere. Exploring the factors and conditions under which this takes place will enhance our knowledge of selection.

Finally, as noted in Section 7.4, the theoretical and empirical insights garnered from the present research are applicable beyond academic debates and may prove useful for policy discussions in the human rights and humanitarian sector. While the results of the study in terms of the relative causal import of heuristics and additional factors may be of some use to policymakers, future efforts may be made to ease the translation of these findings to a suitable format for consumption and use by non-academic audiences. Following Walt (2005, p. 25), policymakers tend to require certain forms of knowledge. These include empirical facts, conceptual frameworks and typologies, intelligible theories of causation, and simplified rules for decision-making. These requirements will vary by the actor in question – INGOs, philanthropic bodies, institutions, or governments – the situational context of their work, and their substantive area of focus. Future research and engagement will be necessary to re-package the study's findings and optimize their utility for policymakers. If done correctly, we may be able to integrate the results into existing frameworks for selection, help to mitigate the negative effects of heuristics, improve the allocation of attention and resources, and ultimately improve patterns of selection to align with policymakers' goals of reducing human harm.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Interview Template

Organization: Oxfam Great Britain **Position**: Humanitarian Campaign Manager **Interview Location**: Conducted online via Zoom. **Date**: 16:00hrs, 17/07/2020
Q1: Oxfam's mission centres on injustice related to poverty. However, it has increasingly viewed its work is as being rights-based. This covers a very large menu of potential areas to work on, such as economic inequality, security and conflict, gender, the environment, among many others. What kinds of issues/projects do Oxfam tend to prioritize to fulfil its mission, and how has its activities evolved in recent years?
Q2: Could you describe the decision-making procedures that underly the selection of Oxfam GB's policies and humanitarian work? Who are the actors involved, and what does the process entail?
Q3: How does Oxfam GB shape its working agenda in relation to what Oxfam as a global organization is doing? Does Oxfam try to ensure coherence, or do national sections work autonomously?
Q4: What would you say are the key factors that drive Oxfam's priorities?
Q5: How much does your previous work, say, what you regard as your previous successes and failures, bear on what you do in the present?
Q6: Could you comment on how assessments of impact and evaluation function and inform your decisions?
Q7: When considering issues to tackle, how would you describe Oxfam's relationship to outside actors e.g. donors, public opinion, or the media?

Q8: How would you describe the characteristics of the typical person who works at Oxfam? What kind of person pursues a career with Oxfam, and how might this impact the kinds of issues you work on?
Q9: Despite the focus on poverty reduction with Oxfam GB, is it fair to say that the affiliate has been reluctant to take on the issue of poverty in Britain? If so, how would you explain this decision?
Q10: Over the past twenty years, climate change has become an increasingly important issue for Oxfam. Why do you think an organization, whose mission is focused on alleviating poverty, decided to select issues surrounding climate change as a priority?

Appendix B

Formal Interviews: Anonymised list of participants and role. Informal conversations – excluded from list – also received informed consent and were recorded as field notes**.**

Senior Policy Advisor - Amnesty International.
Former Secretary General – Amnesty International.
Managing Director – Human Rights Watch.
Deputy Director and Executive Member – Human Rights Watch.
Former Director of Program and Executive Member – Human Rights Watch.
Deputy Executive Director and Former Head of Division – Human Rights Watch.
Director of Division – Human Rights Watch.
Associate Director – Human Rights Watch.
Program Researcher – Human Rights Watch.
Divisional Director for Program – Human Rights Watch.
Academic Expert on Amnesty and Human Rights Watch.
Unit Director of large national entity – Amnesty International.
Senior Policy Advisor on Law and Policy – Amnesty International.

Senior Research Policy Advisor – Amnesty International.
Unit Director – Amnesty International.
Head of Research of large national entity – Amnesty International.
Senior Researcher – Amnesty International.
Unit Director in International Secretariat – Amnesty International.
Director of Division – Amnesty International.
Policy Advisor – Amnesty International.
Advocacy Advisor – Amnesty International.
Deputy Director – Oxfam Great Britain.
Manager in country/region – Oxfam.
Policy and Advocacy Manager – Oxfam.
Senior Policy Advisor – Oxfam USA.
Head of Research – Oxfam Great Britain.
Manager on Humanitarian Campaigns – Oxfam Great Britain.

Appendix C: Consent Agreement and Introductory Text for Conjoint Analysis

Consent Agreement

Welcome and thank you for taking part in this online survey. Please read through the following terms before **agreeing to participate by ticking the 'yes' box at the bottom of the page.**

You have been invited to participate as you are aged 18 or above and are working, or have previously worked, for a non-governmental organization in the humanitarian or charitable sector.

This survey is part of a research project being conducted at the University of Oxford. It should take approximately 8-10 minutes to complete, and no background knowledge is required.

Information recorded in the survey will be confidential, and all responses anonymous. The data may be used for publication in a scientific journal.

Please note that your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any point during the questionnaire for any reason, before submitting your answers, by closing the browser.

How will your data be used?

Your answers will be completely anonymous and we will keep them confidential. Your responses will be stored in a password-protected file and may be used in academic publications. Your IP address will not be stored.

Research data will be stored for a minimum of three years after publication or public release. For research purposes the data that we collect from you may be transferred to, and stored or processed at, a destination outside the European Economic Area ("EEA"). By submitting your personal data, you agree to this transfer, storing or processing.

Who will have access to your data?

The University of Oxford is the data controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. Data may be shared with collaborators, such as the Centre for Experimental Social Science, Nuffield College, University of Oxford. For the duration of the survey data will also be hosted on Qualtrics.

We would like your permission to use your anonymised data in future studies, and to share data with other researchers (e.g. in online databases). Any personal information that could identify you will be removed or changed before files are shared with other researchers or results are made public.

Responsible members of the University of Oxford, funders may be given access to data for monitoring and/or audit of the study to ensure we are complying with guidelines, or as otherwise required by law.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this project, please contact the principal researcher (email: ross.gildea@politics.ox.ac.uk) who will do their best to answer your query. The researcher should acknowledge your concern within 15 working days and give you an indication of how they intend to deal with it.

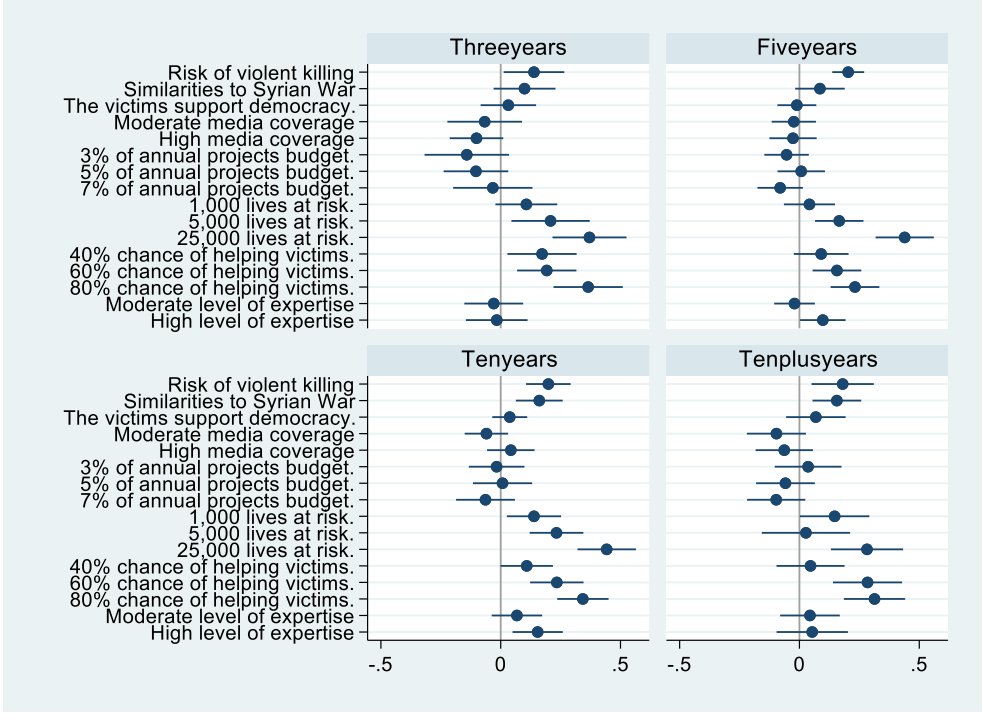
If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the relevant Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford: Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD. The Chair will seek to resolve the matter in a reasonably expeditious manner.

Please note that you may only participate in this survey if you are 18 years of age or over.

If you have read the information above and agree to participate, please check the box below to get started.

Appendix D: Additional Experimental Analysis

Issue Selection by Experience (Years)



Issue Selection by Occupational Rank

