
THREE ESSAYS ON THE NEW POLITICS OF GLOBALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation begins from the collapse of the old politics of globalization to develop three essays on the emergent dynamics of the new. The liberal international order — once designed for confident institutions and consensual rules — has entered crisis. Yet against widespread predictions of global fragmentation, this dissertation finds that powerful constituencies across the international system are not withdrawing from globalization, but seeking to remake it. Across three distinct but interconnected essays, I explore the relationship between these alternative visions of globalization and the institutions that aid or impede efforts to realize them. To do so, I develop a multi-level theory of the new politics of globalization, tracing how micro-level voter preferences are processed by meso-level representative organizations into macro-level designs for the future of globalization — and where they are lost along the way. The first essay challenges conventional accounts of the globalization “backlash” through two original surveys in the United States and United Kingdom, showing that public attitudes toward globalization are more complex, nuanced, and programmatic than existing theories frequently allow: voters — even in these heartlands of backlash — call for stronger forms of international engagement, even if they demand new terms and conditions under which their governments pursue it. The second essay turns to the organizations that claim to represent those preferences, advancing a novel theory of the ‘cartel NGO’ to help explain the evolution of global civil society and its role in the broader system of global governance. Through a detailed case study of Amnesty International, the essay demonstrates how the twin processes of collusion and capture in leading NGOs have eroded their organic link to global civil society, and corrupted the mechanisms of accountability that once lay at the heart of transnational advocacy. The final essay moves to the macro level, analyzing efforts to revive the ‘New International Economic Order’ among states of the Global South. Drawing on text analysis of UN General Assembly debates and fieldwork within the Group of 77, the essay shows that while developing states have recovered a shared sense of Southern solidarity, the diplomatic institution of the G77 — anchored in New York and Geneva — has grown increasingly detached from the political realities that prevail in the country capitals of its member-states; there, the aspiration of economic decolonization has receded and been replaced by a reactive defense of the existing multilateral system, creating a ‘Zombie’ NIEO that staggers where the original once swaggered. Together, these studies recast the crisis of the international order not as a rejection of globalization but as a series of broken mechanisms of representation, articulation, and effective activation to reconstruct it. The dissertation thus contributes both new theoretical frameworks to make sense of the post-liberal transformation of the international order and a new empirical foundation for its potential democratic renovation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
TABLES & FIGURES	5
INTRODUCTION	7
LITERATURE.....	10
THEORY	18
DATA & METHODS	22
FINDINGS	26
OUTLINE	31
THE GLOBALIZATION BACKLASH REVISITED	33
INTRODUCTION	33
LITERATURE.....	37
THEORY	41
DATA & METHODS	44
FINDINGS FROM THE UNITED STATES	47
FINDINGS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM.....	62
MECHANISMS.....	66
ANALYSIS	69
DISCUSSION	82
THE CARTEL NGO	84
INTRODUCTION	84
LITERATURE.....	91
THEORY	104
CASE	112
CONCLUSION.....	162
A NEW NIEO “MOMENT”	165
INTRODUCTION	165
LITERATURE.....	171
THEORY	174
ARGUMENT	178
DATA & METHODS	181
CONDITIONS.....	186
DISCUSSION	210

CONCLUSION	213
FINDINGS	214
CONTRIBUTIONS	220
LIMITATIONS.....	224
DIRECTIONS	226
REFERENCES	228

TABLES & FIGURES

Table 1: Republican Partisanship and Preferences Over Globalization	71
Table 2: UK Partisanship, Brexit, and Attention to International Engagement	74
Table 3: Support for International Engagement on the Economy	79
Table 4: Support for International Engagement on the Environment.....	80
Table 5: Support for International Engagement on Health	81
Table 6: The Two Pathways of Mass Politics.....	85
Table 7: Types of NGO and their characteristics	111
Table 8: Forum Multiplication at Amnesty International.....	139
Table 9: Comparison of Conditions for the NIEO “Moment”.....	180
Table 10: Data Sources on the G77 and the NIEO “Moment”	184
Table 11: Selected List of Interviewees.....	185

Figure 1: “Thinking about the last five years, in which direction have your views changed?” Proportion of answers for each international institution.....	49
Figure 2: Proportion table on respondents’ preferences vis-à-vis international institutions	51
Figure 3: More or Less Attention on US Engagement with Other Countries.....	54
Figure 4: “Thinking about the last five years and U.S. international action for each issue, in which direction have your views changed?”	56
Figure 5: Proportion Table on Who Should Be Given More Control to “Improve Globalization”.....	58
Figure 6: Proportion Table on Who Should Benefit from an International Agreement	59
Figure 7: Profiles of Different Groups Based on Preferences Over Gains from Globalization	60
Figure 8 Proportion of Each Group Who Believe “Communities & Citizens” Should Be Given More Control to Improve Globalization	61
Figure 9: Performance of Globalization	63
Figure 10: How to Face Global Challenges.....	64
Figure 11: More or Less Attention to International Engagement.....	65
Figure 12: How to Reform Globalization	66
Figure 13 International Engagement By Partisanship in United States.....	72
Figure 14: Mapping the Mechanisms	76
Figure 15: Number of NGOs (1983-2019)	87
Figure 16: Types of NGOs.....	107

Figure 17: Amnesty’s “Global Model” (2011)	125
Figure 18: Member Complaints Regarding “Organizing Model” (2021).....	149
Figure 19: The Brandt Line 1970-2020	190
Figure 20: The Brandt Line, Excluding China – 1970-2020	191
Figure 21: The Decolonial Agenda in the General Assembly Debate, 1946-2020	196
Figure 22: The Multilateral Agenda in the General Assembly Debate, 1946-2020	198

1.

INTRODUCTION

On 2 April 2025, on a sunny morning in the Rose Garden of the White House, President Donald Trump officially inaugurated “Liberation Day,” signing into law the Executive Orders 14257 and 14256 that sent shockwaves through the international system of trade. The Orders not only sought to impose a wide range of tariffs on imported goods from the United States’ allies and adversaries alike; they also invoked a national emergency under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to authorize them unilaterally. “The era of rules-based globalization and free trade is over,” said Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, as markets across Asia melted down in response to Trump’s Liberation Day measures. “Global institutions are getting weaker; international norms are eroding. More and more countries will act based on narrow self-interest and use force or pressure to get their way.”

Such an attack on the system of globalization has not been restricted to the subject of trade. In the first six months since coming back into office, the Trump administration withdrew from the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), “putting America first in international environmental agreements” (White House 2025); from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), no longer deemed to fall within the “national interests of the United States” (State Department 2025); and from the World Health Organization (WHO), on account of its “its inability to demonstrate independence from the inappropriate political influence of WHO member states,” the White House (2025) stated.

Nor is this attack restricted to the government of the United States alone. Consider the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Not only did such an invasion mark a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations by the government of Vladimir Putin, tacitly endorsed by many Russian allies that had once come together in a diplomatic group that

called itself the “Friends of the UN Charter.” The invasion also forced a reaction from its Ukrainian victims that similarly served to undermine the existing norms and institutions of the international order. The Ottawa Convention, for example — otherwise known as the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty — has long been considered the ‘landmark’ case of globalization from below (Thakur and Maley 1999; Anderson 2000), with non-governmental organizations from across the world leading the successful International Campaign to Ban Landmines through the 1990s. But in June 2025 — over three years into Russia’s bloody invasion — the government of Ukraine quietly announced its withdrawal from the Convention, tacitly endorsed by its European allies across the continent. “Russia does not adhere to any conventions. So why should we?” one soldier asked (*Reuters* 2025).

Such a logic of contagion points to the central premise of this dissertation: the old politics of globalization — which sustained the so-called “liberal international order” (Ikenberry 2018) over the course of the past half-century — no longer apply. The institutional architecture that once governed globalization now confronts existential challenges from sources that span geographies (East and West), economies (developed and developing), and political systems (democracies and autocracies). Many scholars have reached for Antonio Gramsci’s (1992) concept of an *interregnum* to describe the present moment: the old system of globalization order no longer commands consent, but no successor has yet cohered (Stahl 2019, Babic 2020). “The world is between orders,” says Menon (2022), “it is adrift.” Our task is thus no longer to adjudicate the question of whether the system of globalization is undergoing seismic changes, but which actors are leading its reconstruction, through which processes, and to whose benefit.

These are the dynamics that I describe in the title of this dissertation as the new politics of globalization. I use “globalization” to denote rule-governed, cross-border integration in goods, services, capital, people, and information (Held and McGrew 2007). The politics at issue concern not only levels of such integration but also the modes of its governance: who sets the rules of the new international order, with what accountability, and to what distributive ends. If the Prime Minister of Singapore is right to say that the previous era of globalization is now “over,” then what is the new one that will replace it? How do everyday citizens see the system of globalization, its present performance, and its future direction? How do their representative institutions — from political parties to civil society organizations — respond to popular preferences and press for reforms to global governance? And how do states coordinate and contend over their respective visions of the new international order to come?

This dissertation brings together three distinct papers to help answer these questions and contribute to the emerging literature on the new politics of globalization. Over the course of the past decade, scholars across the fields of international relations, political science, sociology and economics have sought to develop accounts of the present “international disorder” (Innerarity 2016; Haass 2018; Jervis et al 2018; Black et al. 2018). One set of accounts has foregrounded the mass public, suggesting that a rising tide of popular discontent is driving a “backlash” against globalization that endangers the institutions of the liberal international order (Ferguson 2016; Frieden 2017; Crouch 2018; Broz et al 2021; Colantone et al. 2025). Another set of accounts has focused on the political entrepreneurs tasked with translating those popular preferences into programs for reform, from political parties (Burgoon 2012; Norris and Inglehart 2019; De Vries and Hobolt 2020; Vihma et al 2021) to social movement leaders and non-profit organizations (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Allan and Hadden 2017; Tallberg et al 2018; Hale 2020). And a third set of accounts places primary emphasis on states as the decisive actors in the articulation of the new international architecture across systems of security (Ikenberry 2018; Mearshimer 2019; Flockhart 2020), trade (Stiglitz 2018; Heath 2019; Roberts et al. 2019; Hopewell 2021), and climate governance alike (MacNeil and Paterson 2020; Thompson 2024). Yet, as I will argue in the coming section, existing scholarship has left important gaps, revealed enduring puzzles, and suffered from empirical constraints that have limited our understanding of the new politics of globalization at each of these levels of analysis — as well as the interactions between them.

In each of its papers, this dissertation develops novel theoretical frameworks and deploys original data to test them at all three of these levels of analysis — and, in what follows, I attempt to bring them together in a more holistic account of the new politics of globalization. My overarching claim is that the most promising way to understand the contest over the international order is to look across the key actors mobilizing to shape it: to trace how micro-level preferences are aggregated and transformed by meso-level institutions and then fed into macro-level struggles over the aims, operations, and institutional architecture of globalization. The through line between these levels is not automatic: transmission is noisy, representation is selective, and institutional bottlenecks can disconnect ground-level demands from global outcomes. But any thorough account of the new politics of globalization must both examine the dynamics at each of these levels and the imperfect linkages between them. Across three empirical studies, I show how voter preferences about globalization are more nuanced,

structured, and programmatic than the dominant “backlash” narrative suggests; how representative institutions, far from simply amplifying popular demands, may distort them in the course of institutional processes of “cartelization”; how coalitions of states seek to convert discontent into a positive program for a potential “New International Economic Order”— and how present political economic conditions help and hinder them along the way. The resulting synthesis is one that not only looks “down from the summit” of global governance, but also “up from the street,” clarifying the sources of contention over the direction of the international order across the broader political chain of command in the global system.

The remainder of this introduction is divided into five sections. In the next, I review the literature across the fields of international relations, political science, sociology, and economics that have examined the new politics of globalization, dividing them by the ‘level’ of their analysis and identifying the gaps in our understanding at each one. In the third section, I set out the multi-level theory that guides the dissertation, presenting three distinct theoretical frameworks and outlining the potential mechanisms that connect them. In the fourth, I introduce the mixed methods approach that I employ to test those theories, bringing together a wide range of qualitative and quantitative techniques to elucidate the attitudes and operations of voters, parties, NGOs, states and multilateral coalitions that will shape the future of globalization. In the fifth section, I present the key findings from that mixed methods approach across the three papers of this dissertation and their implications for future directions of research. In the final section, I present a roadmap of the chapters to come.

LITERATURE

What are the new politics of globalization? How have scholars made sense of rising discontent with and attacks on its existing institutions? And what can these accounts tell us about the prospects for their renovation, reconstruction, or replacement? In recent years, both scholars and pundits have converged on the view that the liberal international order is “destined to collapse” (Mearsheimer 2019) already “dying” (Goddard et al. 2025), or at least suffering from multiple sources of existential strain (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021). Yet they have differed widely in their approach to making sense of that strain. Specifically, I identify three main approaches to the study of the new politics of globalization, each of which has privileged one level of analysis between the *micro-level* of ordinary people and their voting patterns, the *meso-*

level of institutions and the political entrepreneurs operating inside them, and the *macro-level* of states and their competing visions of the new international order. In what follows, I review the literature at each of these levels of analysis, identifying the critical gaps in existing literature both within and between them.

MICRO

The first approach has focused on micro-level voter preferences as the key driver of the new politics of globalization. For many decades, scholars of international relations paid scant attention to these demand-side dynamics. Their assumption was not only that voters suffered from “cognitive and emotional obstacles” that prohibited any kind of “popular control over foreign policy decisions” (Dahl 1999, 26). Scholars also believed that such control would lead to the “morbid derangement” of the system of globalization, “deadly to the very survival of the state as a free society” (Lippmann 1955, 20, 26). As a result, such accounts tended to eschew a close reading of mass attitudes in favor of elite-centered accounts of the system of globalization and the dynamics of its construction (Keohane 1984; Frieden 1991; Moravcsik 1997).

The rapid rise of populism in advanced democracies, however, shifted scholarly attention back to its popular sources of support (Mudde 2016; Cramer 2016; Rooduijn et al. 2016; Rodrik 2017; Bonikowski 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2018; Inglehart and Norris 2019; Dellmuth et al. 2022). Specifically, the quick succession of surprise electoral outcomes in the form of Britain’s exit from the European Union and Donald Trump’s election to the US presidency pointed to a popular “backlash” against globalization (e.g. Hobolt 2016; Colantone and Stanig 2019) that delivered a new mandate for elected leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to challenge the institutions of the liberal international order that they had once worked to enshrine. According to this first approach, then, the new politics of globalization are defined in large part by the dynamics of demand-side “discontent” (Stiglitz 2017).

Scholars have then engaged in a wide-ranging debate about the sources of such popular discontent. One set of explanations has focused on the economic institutions of globalization and their unequal impacts across the geography of advanced democracies (see, e.g. Mansfield et al 2021). Some highlight the role of international trade, and the “shocks” that have been

administered to advanced economies by their integration into the global economy (Autor et al. 2016, 2020; Colantone and Stanig 2018). Others focus on more domestic sources of discontent, such as the patterns of wealth inequality engendered by housing policies that privilege ownership and accelerate real estate speculation to the exclusion of “left-behind” locations (Adler and Ansell 2020; Broz et al 2021; Rodríguez-Pose et al. 2023). Across both sets of accounts, scholars have sought to elucidate the material drivers of support for strains of populist politics that now menace the liberal international order.

A second set of explanations has focused instead on the cultural dynamics of the globalization backlash. Some of these scholars directly challenge the argument that populism is primarily motivated by pocketbook concerns, arguing instead that voters are reacting negatively to perceived “progressive cultural change” (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 3), suggesting that the struggle over the new politics of globalization is primarily over the values that will govern it (Mansfield and Mutz 2009; Mansfield et al. 2015). Others have sought to accommodate material explanations to “go beyond the silos” of these competing accounts (Walter 2021). Economic exclusion, according to these scholars, may lie behind the rise of xenophobic values (Hays et al. 2019) and authoritarian attitudes (Ballard-Rosa et al. 2021) just as cultural anxieties may drive preferences over trade policy (Gidron and Hall 2017) and support for the populist right at large (Kurer 2020). Together, these studies have attempted to explain the sudden implosion of globalization’s prior rules and norms by focusing on the deeper roots — both material and nonmaterial — of the voter “backlash.”

Yet more recent studies have cast doubt on the backlash thesis, raising important and unanswered questions about the micro-level dynamics of new politics of globalization. Walter (2021), in her extensive review of the backlash literature, argues that existing evidence provides “inconclusive evidence” (423), drawing from the International Social Survey’s successive waves in 1995, 2003, and 2013 to document stable public opinion across economic, political, and socio-cultural forms of globalization. Indeed, for all the studies that proceed from the premise of a popular backlash, there is emerging evidence of its opposite: Kiratli (2022), for example, shows rising citizen support for international organizations such as the United Nations and NATO, just as Nguyen and Spilker (2019) shows a similar trend with relation to trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership that have been the site of major contestation since the start of the populist “revolt” (Goodhart 2017).

A closer examination of the backlash literature — which I conduct in the first empirical chapter to follow this introduction — not only raises questions about the nature of its evidence, but also the validity of its methods. Specifically, I suggest that the dominant methods for studying the backlash may have overstated both its prevalence and intensity, while failing to interrogate the underlying micro-level dynamics they purport to capture. By operationalizing the backlash through populist voting patterns, for example, scholars may have helped to adjudicate between the strength of economic and cultural variables, but they have yet to document voters’ “anti-globalization” intentions (Stiglitz 2016). Indeed, as in the case of Brexit, the Leave vote may have been motivated by a backlash against the European Union, but it may have simultaneously signaled a preference for stronger forms of economic integration into the global economy at large: a new ‘Singapore-on-Thames’ (Owen and Walter 2017).

The existing literature thus leaves open many questions about the micro-level dynamics of the new politics of globalization. What do ordinary people think about globalization? What preferences do they hold about its past performance and its future direction? The answers to these questions hold critical insights both for scholars and policymakers alike. The assumption of a globalization backlash has given license to leaders like Trump to lead a total withdrawal from the international system (Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019, 2024), risking contagion to like-minded leaders linked together in networks like the Conservative Political Action Conference (Turnbull-Dugarte and Rama 2022) — and inspiring a reflexive defense of the old politics of globalization by Trump’s opponents (Osgood 2023). A more accurate portrait of micro-level preferences is thus not only essential for making sense of the true political economy of ‘discontent’; it may also better inform our understanding of the meso-level dynamics in the new politics of globalization.

MESO

The second major approach has focused here — on the institutions that seek to organize the preferences of ordinary people and deploy them to shape the politics of globalization. What role have such institutions played in the collapse of the liberal international order? How have the grassroots activists, organizational bureaucrats, and political entrepreneurs participated in the present revolt against the old system of globalization? And how should we understand their place in its new politics?

One set of scholars have answered this question through the prism of political parties. Since the Great Financial Crisis of 2008, advanced democracies have seen the rise and rise of challenger parties (De Vries and Hobolt 2020) that have “fled the center” (Hobolt and Tilley 2016) to take up more radical positions, including but not limited to the issues of international integration (Persson et al. 2019). The supply-side dynamics are, according to these accounts, determinative of the new politics of globalization: voter demands may not have shifted drastically over the past two decades, but challenger parties and candidates have become far more effective at raising the salience of issues such as trade and immigration in order to win votes to their side (Hooghe and Marks 2009; De Vries et al. 2021). If we hope to explain the political conditions that gave rise to “Liberation Day”, for example — or the subsequent unraveling of the international system of trade — we should focus our attention on the political entrepreneurs that set it off (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2018).

Such studies offer a clear if pessimistic portrait of the new politics of globalization, with meso-level dynamics driving the disintegration of the international order (Trubowitz and Burgoon 2022). Yet that portrait is only partial. Political parties do not have a monopoly on the representation of popular preferences over globalization; on the contrary, evidence suggests very limited voter influence over the direction of foreign policy (Jacobs and Page 2005; Gawthorpe 2022; Saunders 2022). In that vacuum of representation, new actors — such as social movements (Tarrow 1996; McAdam et al. 2003; Tilly and Tarrow 2015; Almeida and Dunn 2018), transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1999; Della Porta and Diani 2015), and international non-governmental organizations (Green 2013; Stroup and Wong 2017; Brass et al. 2018) — have assumed increasing protagonism in the organization of ordinary citizens and the transmission of their ambitions and anxieties about the system of globalization.

Another set of scholars has thus focused on the constructive role — in contrast to challenger parties’ largely *destructive* role — that these actors play in the politics of globalization. Over the past half-century, new information technologies have allowed for transnational networks to flourish (Castells and Cardoso 1996) in and beyond the digital sphere (Castells 1999), forging a new space of global civil society (Kaldor 2003) and a new set of opportunities for ‘principle’-driven actors (Mitchell and Schmitz 2014) to operate within it. The development of these actors, in turn, has been both cause and consequence of a broader “opening up” (Tallberg et al. 2013; Jönsson and Tallberg 2023) of international organizations to civil society, creating

new political opportunities for these meso-level institutions to advance proposals for their reform. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), through this lens, are the key transmission mechanism through which global civil society gains a voice in the new politics of globalization (Steffeck and Nanz 2008).

More recent literature, however, has called this constructive role into question, motivating the meso-level chapter on the structure, role, and internal operation of NGOs in the new politics of globalization. Many of these studies start from an alternative premise, namely that NGOs are not purely motivated by altruistic intentions, but may be understood to operate in a market that determines both their incentives and their outcomes (Cooley and Ron 2002; Büthe and Mattli 2011; Watkins et al. 2012; Bush 2015). Rather than seeking to represent the preferences of their ‘principals’, these studies suggest that NGOs pursue the political resources that can boost their market position, from professional authority (Stroup and Wong 2017) to donor access (Rauh 2010), even if it comes at the cost of its stated mission (Gent et al. 2015).

Yet few studies to date have accounted for this process of dissociation between the stated aims and internal operations of international NGOs — and its implications for the broader politics of globalization. In their recent study, Bush and Hadden (2019) trace a striking empirical pattern: after decades of their rapid multiplication, the growth rate of INGO has suddenly declined, even as international organizations have “opened up” to their influence. “The decline and stagnation in growth rate,” they write, “is puzzling from the perspective of existing theory, necessitating new thinking” (1133). Are we living through the “end of the age of NGOs” (Bush and Hadden 2025)? If so, how should we understand their persistence as influential actors on the world stage? And if not NGOs, which actors are today putting forward a macro-level vision of the new international order to come? This dissertation seeks to answer these questions, both with “new thinking” at the meso-level of analysis as well as a more detailed account of the macro-level outcomes on which it bears.

MACRO

The third and final approach to the new politics of globalization has zoomed out to focus on the macro-level contest over the construction of a new international order. These accounts start from a shared premise of a present ‘interregnum’ (Stahl 2019): a world suspended “between

orders” (Menon 2022), with an ample structure of political opportunity for a “great power or group of powers [to take] up the task of creating and imposing new rules” (Slaughter 2017). From that premise, recent scholarship has set itself a threefold task: to identify the key sites of contestation between the powers vying for position in the current interregnum; to describe the institutional forms through which that contestation takes place; and to map the competing visions, program, and “projects” that might plausibly structure the next phase of globalization.

If these scholars consider it an open question of which “powers” will determine the future of the international order, the constitution of such powers is less so. For several decades, the politics of globalization was defined by the emergence of transnational actors that sought to displace the traditional authority of the nation-state (Walzer 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1999; Strange 2009), putting greater scholarly focus on the meso-level actors discussed in the previous section. The combination of recent crises that roiled the globe, however — from the Great Financial Crisis to the Covid-19 pandemic — has brought the nation-state back to the center stage of these accounts of globalization (Grygiel 2016; Gerbaudo 2021; Woods et al. 2020). The idea that growing interdependence would shift authority away from the state was thus challenged by new accounts of how those states could weaponize the institutions of interdependence to pursue nationally interested ends (Farrell and Newman 2019; Drezner et al. 2021).

Such heightened attention to the sources of “infrastructural power” (Mann 2008) has thus drawn one set of scholars focus on the dynamics of great power competition. According to these accounts, the present interregnum is likely to privilege states that exercise control over the key levers of the economy (Csurgai 2017). To one side, scholars point to the overwhelming infrastructural control that the United States secured for itself in the construction of the existing system of globalization (Blackwill and Harris 2016), which grants to it the enduring ability to bully both allies and adversaries through mechanisms like economic sanctions (Drezner 2024) — even in a period of its waning global dominance (Layne 2006, 2012). To the other, scholars point to the emergence of China as a new global superpower, and the ways in which it has sought to reorder the institutions of the global economy in its image (Cha 2023). Both sides of this great power literature suggest that the rivalry between the United States and China — a ‘Second Cold War’, as many scholars understand it (see Schindler et al. 2024) — will not only shape the future of their respective spheres of influence, but also determine the macro-level architecture of the international order at large (Allison 2017).

A second camp of the macro-level literature, however, has challenged these accounts of great power competition and the assumption of its totalizing consequences. Instead, these scholars have looked to emergent institutional dynamics — beyond and between the traditional boundaries of great powers — in order to make sense of the “hybrid, pluralist, and mixed orders that are emerging from recent global changes” (Roy 2022, 1). Against predictions of increasing great power influence, for example, Acharya (2017) argues that a ‘multiplex’ order is now in formation, with the emergence of “new actors and approaches that do not bend to America’s commands and preferences” (277). Indeed, such approaches may circumvent the traditional infrastructure over which countries like the United States exercise control, as in the case of the BRICS-led New Development Bank (NDB) and the IBSA Trilateral Forum that preceded it (Alden and Pere 2024), or regional formations such as the Union of South American Nations (Sanahuja 2012). These strains of ‘Southern multilateralism’ thus point toward a macro-level vision of a multipolar world, where overlapping rules and norms give rise to a wide variety of international ‘orders’ (Kacowicz 1999).

Yet both camps in the macro-level literature appear to converge on the view of the coming fragmentation of the international order. Some consider this fragmentation to result from a failure of the multilateral system, as in the case of institutional “gridlock” (Held, Hale, and Young 2013) that fails to yield effective reforms. Others consider fragmentation to be functional, allowing greater flexibility and fluidity than under previous conditions of unipolarity (Búzás and Graham 2020). Yet neither leaves room for the possibility that states may forge a new consensus on the shape of the globalization to come — nor that the gains of that globalization might be positive-sum in their distribution. Such a pessimistic account of the prospects for the future international order seem to cut against recent empirical developments. Against predictions of fragmentation, for example, Voeten and Kentikelenis (2020) document *declining* criticisms of the existing international order in recent years to an “all-time low” (747). On the contrary, at the level of the UN General Assembly that forms the focus of their study, visions of a “new international economic order” are not only being developed through institutions such as the Economic and Financial Committee — they are also being voted through by large majorities of states from across the world (Radley 2025).

Far less scholarly attention has been paid to these emergent macro-level visions — as to the international political economic conditions under which they emerge, flourish, or fail. This

dissertation seeks to develop a theory that can redress this gap in the macro-level literature across its three distinct levels. First, we have few empirically grounded accounts of how states forge a common preference over the future of the international order — that is, the move from grievances to aspirations. Second, we lack theoretical criteria for identifying when and how those states are able to advance that common vision in coalition with each other — that is, the move from aspirations to programs of action. And third, we require a more detailed understanding of the institutional dynamics — at national, regional, and global scales — that either aid or impede the implementation of that program. A closer examination of those dynamics promises not only to contribute to existing scholarship on the crisis of ‘contested multilateralism’ (Morse and Keohane 2013); it may also point the way to its resolution in the form of a new macro-level vision of the international order to come.

THEORY

This dissertation aims to develop a theory of the new politics of globalization that can account for these three levels of analysis — and the interactions between them. In doing so, I do not seek to impose a single causal chain to be traced across its three papers. Rather, I strive to develop novel theoretical insights for each level of analysis, and to specify the mechanisms that, taken together, help to explain the patterns of contention that link together (i) citizens with evolving preferences over the terms and conditions of international cooperation, (ii) institutions that selectively transmit, mute, or distort those demands; and (iii) coalitions that seek systemic reform of the global governance system — and the political economic constraints that may frustrate their ambitions along the way.

I begin at the micro-level with a theory of voter preferences. Here, I revisit the “globalization backlash” thesis that has motivated so much of the existing literature on the new politics of globalization, beginning with the first tractable definition of its two constituent claims. First, the backlash thesis holds that *citizens are increasingly discontent*. The thesis requires a large and growing proportion of voters in advanced democracies to express anger, resentment, or general dissatisfaction with the globalization status quo. Second, *citizen discontent translates into a preference for international disintegration*. The backlash thesis implies that dissatisfaction leads voters to prefer exit from international institutions, violation of their norms, or other forms of unilateral action by their respective national governments.

As I set out in the previous section, however, new evidence has challenged the empirical basis of the backlash thesis — and raised fresh questions about citizens’ underlying preferences over globalization, how they may be changing over time, and whether that change can be interpreted to deliver an ‘anti-globalization’ mandate to the leaders whom they elect. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I thus develop a novel theory that corresponds to the more nuanced portrait of citizen preferences suggested by scholars like Walter (2021). Specifically, I break apart the constituent claims of the backlash thesis to allow for greater texture, intensity, and diversity of popular attitudes to globalization. Voters are certainly becoming more critical of the existing institutions of the international order, but — as Voeten and Kentikelenis (2020) have shown — that criticism may not necessarily be translating into a preference for their disintegration. Instead, I propose that citizens may have become *more* rather than *less* supportive of international engagement — but on more democratic terms, accounting for their criticisms, needs, and policy priorities. The presumed rise of *anti*-globalization attitudes, seen through this lens, may be better understood as a new form of *alter*-globalization politics, with citizens crying out for global governance reforms even if the dominant social scientific methods to measure their preferences have so far failed to account for them.

I then turn to the meso-level to develop a theory of NGOs and their evolving relationship to global civil society. Scholars have historically conceived of that relationship in organic terms: NGOs grow out of civil society, and — as a natural extension of it — act to “transmit” its demands onto the global stage (Steffeck and Nanz 2008). The steady, linear growth of these NGOs was thus understood to reflect the increasing strength and relevance of civil society actors in the new politics of globalization (Held 1995). As set out in the previous section, however, recent findings from Bush and Hadden (2019) have documented the reversal of this empirical trend, with the precipitous decline in the rate at which NGOs are emerging. Such a trend not only necessitates “new thinking” (Ibid. 1133) on the dynamics of conflict and cooperation in the ecosystem of NGOs (Stroup 2019). It also calls into question the nature of the relationship between NGOs and the global civil society they are assumed to represent, and the broader prospects for micro-level preferences to find expression in the new politics of globalization, in turn.

To help explain these surprising empirical trends, I adapt the theory of the ‘cartel party’ first introduced by Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1995) to trace the evolution of NGOs and their

evolving relationship to global civil society. Specifically, I posit that representative theories of NGOs — just like those of political parties — fail to capture the dynamics of competition and cartelization that have, over time, severed the organic connection that once linked NGOs to the global civil society out of which they originally grew. Instead, I propose that we can trace NGO development across the four stages set out by Katz and Mair’s study of party systems: first, in the form of a *cadre* NGO, with tight-knit communities of activists dedicating their lives to the cause; second, in the form of a *mass* NGO, growing into the enlarged space of global civil society enabled by the diffusion of digital technologies to forge transnational networks operated by highly trained professionals; third, in the form of a *catch-all* NGO, spreading out from the original issue area around which the founding cadre once organized in order to capture political resources through increasingly capital-intensive strategies; fourth and finally, in the form of the *cartel* NGO, fully disconnected from global civil society in order to maintain insider access even at the expense of outsider representation. In the third chapter of this dissertation, I flesh out this typology across seven dimensions of NGO organization, from membership and structure to leadership and strategies of legitimation.

In doing so, this theoretical framework helps to resolve the puzzle set out by Bush and Hadden (2019) — with broader implications for our understanding of the role of meso-level institutions in the new politics of globalization. As set out in the previous section of this chapter, scholars have long debated whether NGOs are motivated by principle or acting as self-interested players in a ‘marketplace’ (Cooley and Ron 2002). Yet little scholarship has set out to develop a model of that marketplace, even as economists call to revise theories of market competition by accounting for firms’ market power (Khan 2018) — and the exclusionary effects that market power can play on potential new entrants. The theory of the cartel NGO brings in these economic insights to account for the ways in which the ‘NGO scramble’ has been structured over time to privilege dominant ‘Big INGOs’ — or BINGOs (Stroup and Wong 2016) — that coordinate and collude to keep out competition, with disastrous consequences for the quality control of their ‘product’. Even as the institutions of globalization undergo a process of ‘opening up’ (Tallberg et al. 2013), then, the space for popular representation may be ‘shutting down’, as BINGOs box out the more dynamic, grounded, and democratically legitimate *cadre*-oriented organizations from which they once grew.

These meso-level insights then support the development of the novel theoretical framework that I apply to our understand of macro-level dynamics. Scholars once considered civil society

to be a great engine of global transformation: the “new superpower,” in the words of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (1998), “the true guardians of democracy and good governance everywhere.” Operating through NGOs, global civil society could directly contest supranational institutions such as the IMG (Walzer 1995). And — through boomerang effects (Keck and Sikkink 1999) — global civil society could shape the domestic policy choices that comprise globalization at large. My theory suggests, however, that global civil society may no longer play this role, with the corruption of the representative function that was once delegated upward to NGO professionals. On the contrary, advanced processes of cartelization imply that we may be living through the “end of the age of NGOs” (Bush and Hadden 2025), with power “shifting back” (Ibid., 2) to the states from which they once claimed it. The combination of global shocks such as Covid-19 and the rise of populist politics has only confirmed this trend, asserting the primacy of the nation-state in a new politics of globalization centered heavily on the contest over ‘sovereignty’ (Lehoczki 2024).

In the fourth chapter of the dissertation, then, I develop a theory of states and their efforts to advance a macro-level vision of the international order that can both defend the principle of national sovereignty and extend the practice of international cooperation to advance common interests. Specifically, I articulate a theory of what has been called the new NIEO ‘moment’ (Kozul-Wright and Gallagher 2022) — a reference to the 1974 UN Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO) and the political economic conditions that gave rise to it. Back then, too, scholars understood the world to be “waiting for the new order” (Barraclough 1976), as massive global shocks to energy and currency markets created a similar perception of ‘interregnum’ (Stahl 2019) during which the poorer nations of the ‘Third World’ (Prashad 2007) organized to advance a shared program of action to reform the systems of international trade, finance, and development in their favor (Gilman 2015). Today, a wide range of scholars have noted the reactivation of the NIEO as a macro-level vision to guide the new politics of globalization (Dutt and Dos Santos 2023; Galbraith 2023; Ghosh 2023; Garavini 2025), with repeated UN resolutions introduced by the Economic and Financial Committee — and approved by the General Assembly — carrying in its name.

This dissertation thus develops a theoretical framework to define an ‘NIEO moment’ and diagnose its constituent conditions. Building from insights first developed by Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation* (1944), I set out six conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient to qualify as an NIEO moment, defined here as one in which “the world’s less

developed nations advance an alternative vision of global economic governance to contend with the actually existing system sustained by the world's more developed nations". These include environmental preconditions such as *interregnum*, requiring an opening in the political opportunity structure to allow such an alternative vision to advance; but also they include a condition of collective *activation*, or the extent to which — in the words of Polanyi — the leaders of less developed nations both “discover” the crisis of the old international order and “anticipate” their role in replacing it. The articulation of that alternative, in my theoretical framework, is far from automatic. To qualify as an NIEO moment, states must develop a common *aspiration* for the international order to come, forge a *coalition* to pursue it, and exercise sufficient structural *power* in order to challenge most developed nations to accept the core tenets of their *program*.

Taken together, these six conditions offer a clear set of theoretical criteria through which to evaluate the prospects for macro-level transformation of the international order. Combining structural factors (such as balance of trade), institutional factors (such as diplomatic coordination), and party-political factors (such as incumbent ideology), the theory of the NIEO moment not only aims to shed light on the diverse processes through which states succeed or fail to reform the system of globalization. By incorporating the bottom-up pressures that shape the expression of these factors, it also aims to bring together the three levels of analysis around which this dissertation is organized, tracing the extent to which micro-level discontent is processed into meso-level institutions, and marshalled into macro-level visions of a more democratic and equitable international order, in turn.

DATA & METHODS

In order to test the theoretical frameworks developed across the three level of this dissertation's analysis, I employ a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative strategies to make sense of the new politics of globalization (Green et al. 1989). To test the micro-level hypotheses regarding voter preferences, I conducted two original surveys that help to provide an updated portrait of citizen attitudes toward globalization, and to explore the sources of their variation. To test the meso-level theory of the cartel NGO, I develop a detailed case study of Amnesty International, a ‘crucial case’ (Gerring 2004) in the field of human rights, diving deep into the multi-dimensional organizational dynamics that may generate “confidence in the theory's validity, or, conversely, must not fit equally well any rule contrary

to that proposed” (Eckstein 1975, 118). And to test the macro-level theory of the NIEO moment — set across its six conditions — I complement “text as data” (Gentzkow et al. 2019) analysis of UN General Assembly debates with fieldwork and semi-structured interviews that shed light on the complex dynamics of the Group of 77 in a rapidly evolving geopolitical environment. Together, these mixed-method approaches aim to trace key processes that link together grassroots pressures and global governance outcomes.

The next chapter (CUREC approval # C1A_21_017:C1A_21_023) focuses on two original surveys conducted in 2021 across the two key national contexts of the United States and the United Kingdom. In the former, I commissioned an original survey of 1,479 likely voters through polling firm Data for Progress, employing quota random sampling amongst registered voters using quotas on age, gender, race, ethnicity, and education; in the latter, I commissioned an original survey through the YouGov UniOM scheme of 1,600 likely voters, sampled and weighted to be nationally and politically representative, using political weights such as past vote for the 2016 EU Referendum and degrees of political attention. Both cases were selected according to a ‘most likely’ logic for the globalization backlash under study (Seawright and Gerring 2008). Scholars have not only identified these countries as heartlands of the backlash, as represented by the twin phenomena of the Brexit vote (Goodhardt 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018) and the election of Donald Trump (Norris 2016; Rodrik 2017; Stiglitz 2017). They have also raised the concerns that backlash in these geopolitically mighty countries risks the contagion of *disintegrationist* politics to their neighbor nations (De Vries 2020; Walter 2020; Giani and Méon 2021).

Across both original surveys, I deploy both descriptive and analytical methods to make sense of voter attitudes in the heartlands of the backlash. Surveys are designed to redress key methodological limitations of the existing literature, which — I will illustrate — has all too frequently operationalized the backlash through ‘populist’ vote choices (see Scheiring et al. 2024 for a meta-analysis of this literature). As such, the surveys aim to allow for a richer, more complex, and therefore more accurate portrait of voter preferences, set across sections that distinguish between: (i) domain-specific cooperation, such as health, environment, and living standards; (ii) institutional architecture, offering a range of policy options regarding the direction of contested international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization; and (iii) distributional outcomes, both in terms of political authority and economic gains from globalization. I then use these data both to test the key hypotheses of my

theory regarding the voter preferences for the *re*-integration — as opposed to *dis*-integration — of the international order, as well as examine potential mechanisms that may be driving those preferences using the ‘statistical workhorse’ (Krueger and Lewis-Beck 2008) of standard OLS regression. Such methods can only provide limited causal leverage in the broader search for the sources of citizen discontent with globalization; indeed, the surveys rely on self-assessments of changes to respondents’ attitudes toward international engagements. Despite their limitations, these self-assessments are critical to my effort to revisit the globalization backlash and its underlying assumption of an explicit popular polarization against international cooperation. The methods of the second chapter are thus designed to provide a strong empirical basis for its effort to clarify theories of globalization backlash.

The third chapter of the dissertation (CUREC approval # SSH_DPIR_C1A_23_023) moves to the meso-level with an in-depth case study of Amnesty International. Founded in 1961 by a small cadre of committed activists and Quakers appealing for the release of ‘Prisoners of Conscience,’ or PoCs, Amnesty has since grown to count on the “collective power of 10 million people” that it considers part of its “movement” (Amnesty 2021), moving out of a London basement to establish chapters and offices across the world — and securing an annual budget of over 400 million US dollars. Amnesty thus offers a crucial case for the generation and exploration of my theory of the cartel NGO and the broader evolution of the ecosystem through which it has developed across the four phases that I set out in my framework: long-lived, globally distributed, and deeply enmeshed in multilateral forums — attributes that maximize leverage on key dimensions such as professionalization, access, and accountability.

Over the course of 18 months in 2023 and 2024, I conducted over 30 semi-structured interviews with current and former Amnesty staff, members, and volunteers, and reviewed thousands of pages of internal documents from board meetings, Annual General Meetings (AGMs), and local chapter internal communications. The selection of interview subjects was ‘purposeful’, designed to test hypotheses at both the highest levels of Amnesty’s organizational hierarchy (e.g. Secretaries General) as well as its lowest (e.g. chapter volunteers) in order to trace processes of potential cartelization from the grassroots of the Amnesty ‘movement’ to its executive global operations (Dahal et al. 2024). Amnesty’s internal documents similarly aim to shed light on the internal dynamics of the organization, moving beyond the top-line numbers celebrated in its public reports to trace the debates and deliberations that have shaped Amnesty’s trajectory across the six decades of its evolution. My methods thus aim to identify

sequences consistent with the cartelization thesis: centralization of decision rights; harmonization of brand and diversification of policy programming; the proliferation of accountability clubs and partnership MoUs; and resource dependencies that prioritize donor-facing functions away from its founding mission to “re-kindle a fire in the minds of men” (Benenson 1961).

The fourth and final empirical chapter of the dissertation (CUREC approval # SSH_DPIR_C1A_24_001) tests the macro-level theory of the NIEO moment with a mixed-methods study of the Group of 77, the peak organization of 134 developing nations operating at the level of the United Nations. Established at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in June 1964, the G77 has been understood as the historical vehicle through which the states of the Global South articulate a common vision of the international order (Gosovic and Ruggie 1976). One decade after its establishment, the diplomatic bloc of the G77 led the world to pass by consensus the UN Resolution on the Establishment of the New International Economic Order, suggesting — in a previous period of geopolitical volatility — that “a coalition of the weak can affect regime-creation” (Rothstein 1984, 307) at the global level. Today, the G77 endures (Lees 2023), as a stable diplomatic bloc with deep historical roots and a lasting commitment to its founding principle of Southern protagonism. I thus focus on the case of the G77 as the key arena through which both the old and the new NIEO have been developed, deliberated, and contested both from within and without.

I deploy three main methods to test the theory of the NIEO moment, each of which aims to elucidate the processes through which it may or may not find expression in the present ‘interregnum.’ The first method is text analysis of UN General Assembly debates, building from the rich data set first introduced by Baturo et al. (2017). Scholars have frequently looked to the General Assembly to make sense of the state of key international debates (Smith 2001), the signals that global leaders are sending to their respective domestic audiences (Dreher and Gassebner 2012), and the status of the international order writ large (Voeten and Kentikelenis 2020). In order to evaluate key conditions of the NIEO moment, then — such as the *activation* of the Southern bloc, and the formation of its collective *aspiration* — I code thousands of full speeches at the UN General Assembly from G77 heads of state, government, and country delegation in *R* from 1946 all the way up to the present. The goal of this method is not simply to trace the salience of one policy issue or another, but rather to evaluate their evolution over

time, allowing for a deeper and more accurate comparison of the two NIEO ‘moments’ under observation in this chapter.

Yet these speeches offer only limited insight into the underlying organizational dynamics of the G77. As such, the fourth chapter complements the text analysis of the UN General Debate corpus with two additional sources of original data. The first comes from 40 semi-structured interviews that I conducted — both in-person and on-line — with a wide range of officials from across the G77, including heads of state, ministers, ambassadors, negotiators, and former Chairs of the Group. The second comes from observations collected through fieldwork at the Third South Summit of the G77 in Kampala, Uganda, where I participated in closed-door ministerial meetings, side events on special subjects such as trade and finance, as well as informal dinners with delegates from across the Group. These qualitative methods allowed me to get ‘inside’ of the Group and ‘beyond’ its rhetorical register, directly probing questions of political strategy, coalition management, and perceptions of opportunity and constraint. Together, these interviews and observations support a rich, detailed, and often contradictory account of the G77’s efforts to remake the international order in its image, and the sources of contestation — within the bloc, beyond the bloc, and within each of its member-states — that may frustrate that effort.

FINDINGS

What are the key findings of this dissertation? What can they tell us about the theories articulated in the previous sections of this chapter? And what can they teach us about the broader politics of globalization in a world “between orders”? I begin with the first empirical study and its effort to revisit the globalization backlash thesis at the center of present accounts of rising populism (Ferguson 2016). The results of the two original surveys in the United States and the United Kingdom both challenge and clarify the backlash thesis. The data that I present in the following chapter appear to confirm its first constituent claim that citizens have become increasingly critical of globalization and the international organizations tasked with managing it. Yet the data also suggest that this criticism has not translated into a popular mandate for their deconstruction. Indeed, across both the US and the UK, I find the opposite: a large majority of voters call for *more* rather than *less* international engagement — a proportion that only grows when queried on specific issue areas such as living standards and infectious diseases. The proportion of genuine ‘backlashers’ — that is, voters who prefer not only to exit

international organizations such as the UN but also to abandon their guiding missions — is revealed to be vanishingly small compared to the standard measurement put forward in the literature. Instead, when presented with a more diverse set of options to guide their governments' foreign policies, voters express a preference for democratic reforms that grant them greater voice in the articulation of the new politics of globalization.

These findings thus bring additional support to theories that emphasize the endurance of the international order, even under conditions of its intense strain (Ikenberry 2018). The dominant narrative that has emerged over the course of the populist “revolt” (Frieden 2019) has posited that a rising tide of “anti-globalization” sentiment is responsible for increasing threats of exit from the system of globalization (Zaslove 2008). But what if the very concept of “anti-globalization” is little more than a misnomer? Voeten and Kentikelenis (2020) suggest that, even at the level of the United Nations, attacks on the institutions of the international order may be in decline. I bring this finding back down to the level of voter preferences. Even in the backlash heartlands of the US and UK, I find little evidence of anti-globalization sentiment. Instead, my findings point to increasing contest over the design of globalization — who gets what and why (Roth 2015) — far more than the polarized model of pro- and anti-globalization preferences permits. The second chapter thus calls for greater scholarly attention to the depth and complexity of voter attitudes to globalization, challenging longstanding assumptions of their “cognitive and emotional obstacles” (Dahl 1999) to examine which kind of globalization they prefer, and how they hope to achieve it.

Turning to the third chapter and its study of Amnesty International, I find confirmation of the cartelization thesis across all seven dimensions of the framework. Through extensive interviews and analysis of internal documents, for example, I find the Amnesty's membership model has undergone a drastic transformation over the past six decades — even as the organization continues to legitimate its operations through its claim to operate as a ‘movement’ of ten million members. Where Amnesty once relied on labor-intensive, cadre-oriented tactics such as letter-writing and case-based research, the development of digital technologies both allowed the organization to scale its membership to masses across the world — facilitated by processes of “forum multiplication” (Allan 2020) through which Amnesty broadened out from its original “mandate” to liberate PoCs to a multi-dimensional “mission” that runs from gun control to LGBTQ+ rights — and served to restrict their engagement to passive, ‘clicktivist’ activities such as signatures on an online petition and donations to the organization. Today, as

one interviewee told me, “Amnesty considers anyone who donates to be a member,” while decision-making processes have been increasingly concentrated in a stratum of credentialed professionals. Behind Amnesty’s claim of a ten-million-member movement, I find, “active membership” has been in dramatic decline, even as its annual budget continues to steadily climb. These processes thus provide empirical support to the claim that NGOs have disconnected from the global civil society out of which they once grew, in a similar pattern traced by Katz and Mair (1995) in their study of party systems.

The cartelization thesis, however, not only refers to the internal dynamics of NGOs, but also to the relationship between them. My case study appears to confirm the hypothesis of increasing collusion among the so-called BINGOs that have come to dominate their organizational ecosystem (Stroup and Wong 2017). Specifically, I show how the process of professionalization that accompanied the development of the field of human rights since the 1960s has created a revolving door dynamic through which BINGOs such as Amnesty coordinate with competitor organizations to attract and exchange personnel: “a game of musical chairs,” as one interviewee described it. Yet this dynamic of collusion extends far past the field of talent acquisition and into the tactics of development finance. Through extensive interviews with Amnesty’s development team, I trace the emergence of new data cooperation agreements between these BINGOs that both pool and concentrate their access to “high net-worth individuals”, tracked through new third-party corporations that aggregate digital information to create a “financial portfolio profile” of potential donors. “We literally go to Greenpeace, and we say: We will give you 10,000 names from our list if you gave us 10,000 names from your list,” one interviewee told me. “Non-profits follow the corporate space. As the corporate space becomes saturated, these companies come to the non-profit sector to sell us their tools. And if you have the cash available, then non-profits can take advantage of those. We get the corporate sloppy seconds, and if you’re ahead of other non-profits, you can beat out the competitors.”

The findings of the third chapter thus help to resolve the guiding puzzle first introduced by Bush and Hadden’s (2019) groundbreaking research on the NGO ecosystem. The rapid decline in the establishment of new NGOs cannot only be attributed to novel strategies deployed by governments to contain them (Bush and Hadden 2024). On the contrary, my study reveals the ways in which NGOs like Amnesty have developed strong and symbiotic relationships with the governments they were once founded to resist, with new “government relations teams”

designed explicitly to develop, manage, and deploy those relationships to demonstrate Amnesty's policy influence. As such, the case study calls for greater attention to the structure of NGO's 'scramble' for resources (Cooley and Ron 2002), and the ways in which its market actors structure their operations in order to reduce the scope of competition and discourage the formation of new, cadre NGOs still operating from inside the sphere of global civil society. The upshot is not that NGOs abandon advocacy, just as cartel parties do not abandon their pursuit of state power; rather, it is that advocacy becomes a vehicle through which to secure NGOs financial survival, rather than to deliver accountability to their members or the affected communities they purport to represent.

In the fourth and final empirical chapter of this dissertation, I find that — despite its many eulogies (Rothstein 1984; Mitchell 1993; Williams 1993; Gilman 2015) — the NIEO is very much alive. Not only has the old international order given way to a new interregnum (Stahl 2019), but the states of the G77 — through the course of the present “polycrisis” (Tooze 2022) — have also been activated toward a new sense of unity of purpose to construct a new one. The experience of Covid-19 in particular, I find, was critical to this process of activation, as the latent fault line between developed and developing nations — which, as I show, never disappeared in structural terms — became the explicit divide in pandemic governance; Covid-19, one South African diplomat told me, “exposed something deeply concerning about the multilateral system and generally the disposition towards of the Global North towards the Global South.” This emergent ‘Southern consciousness’, I find, is a critical factor in the reemergence of the G77 as a key player in multilateral fora such as the UNFCCC, as well as hosting two high-level summits in the span of just three months, after nearly a decade without one.

The new Southern unity, however, has not (yet) translated into a common aspiration. The original NIEO was motivated by a single overriding concern: the imperative of “economic decolonization” (Getachew 2019), following the successful struggle for territorial decolonization across the Third World. The text analysis presented in the fourth chapter shows that this aspiration has all but disappeared from the vocabulary of the G77 leaders — and has yet to be replaced by a new one. Instead, I find that the *proactive* role that the G77 once assigned to itself in the articulation of a new international order has been replaced by a *reactive* one, concerned primarily with the defense of the existing multilateral system in the context of perceived threats by greater powers. In that context, I find, the transformational ambitions that

once guided the G77 and the associated Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) have receded to largely transactional ones, as member-states navigate the new geopolitical volatility by seeking to strike deals with dominant powers rather than build strength from inside the non-aligned bloc.

Yet my qualitative data also reveal the limitations of an empirical approach that focuses exclusively on the level of the United Nations (Lees 2023). More specifically, the data collected in my fieldwork suggest a growing rift between the G77's diplomatic activities — and the *esprit de corps* that endures in places like Geneva and New York — and the policies articulated by their member-state governments in their respective capitals. One former Chair of the G77 described this as the “schizophrenia” of the G77: “What’s fascinating is that you have these diplomats who play two roles — career diplomats who uphold the tradition of the 60s and 70s Third Worldism, but then they are also playing close to the US unipolar moment when they get home.” At ‘home,’ I find, the NIEO agenda articulated by G77 diplomats has become increasingly contested along ideological lines, perceived as “left-wing” — one interviewee told me — by many of the right-wing leaders that assumed power across the continents of the Global South. Such a sociological distinction between the political cultures at play at the UN and in country capitals thus helps to explain the puzzle of G77 endurance, holding together as a bloc of nations even as its members pursue radically opposed programs of policy reform.

The NIEO may have been resurrected, then, but only in zombie form. As one interviewee put it: “The conditions are all there. The breakdown of the system? Check. The arrival of Trump to oversee its destruction? Check... But there is no theory of change that is rooted in a decolonial project.” Governments of the Global South are today “walking up and down escalator,” according to one G77 head of state, with daily crises that distract from the perceived lofty ambitions to reconstruct the international order. Far from realizing the latent structural leverage of their combined resource power — as they once did in the form of OPEC (Garavini 2019) — the South has been left to bargain over “crumbs.” Such a dynamic of desperation, I show, helps to explain why the Third South Summit — the supreme decision-making body of the G77 — attracted only two heads of state from 134 members. The remainder traveled to the World Economic Forum at Davos, one interviewee said, “to meet with the presidents, prime ministers, and heads of the Bretton Woods institutions in order to get their debt rescheduled and their loans approved, their carbon markets finance... To go collect their crumbs.”

Taken together, the key findings of this dissertation tell a broader story about the dynamics of the new politics of globalization. A new consensus is emerging at all levels of the international system about the urgent need to reform the institutions of global governance — and even, as my case study of the G77 shows, about potential directions for such reforms. But the key actors that have been tasked with advocating, demanding, and securing the transformation of the international order are unfit — or unwilling — to do so. From NGOs to multilateral coalitions, the institutions once considered to hold promise for the agenda of global governance have eroded, hollowed, and in some cases actively turned away from that longstanding ambition. The likely result, I argue, will be to inflame rather than resolve the sources of discontent that have given rise to the present interregnum. Scholars may have exaggerated the call to disintegrate the institutions of the international order, but without faithful institutions to reform them, such a call may yet move from the margins to win a mandate across the world.

OUTLINE

The remainder of this dissertation is organized in three papers and a conclusion. Each paper addresses its own set of theoretical questions, drawing from a unique set of original data collected to address them. As such — even as I weave a story through the broader dissertation — each paper is designed to stand alone as an academic paper, setting out the literature, theory, methods, and findings that correspond to it. The concluding chapter reviews the key contributions from these papers, and seeks to derive broader implications for the study of the new politics of globalization.

Chapter two, “The Globalization Backlash Revisited,” explores the micro-level literature and the methodological challenges that it presents for our understanding of voter preferences over globalization. I then deploy the data from the two original surveys in the United States and the United Kingdom to redress those methodological challenges and develop a more thorough, accurate, and multi-dimensional account of evolving attitudes to globalization in advanced democracies.

Chapter three, “The Cartel NGO,” moves to the meso-level to explore how scholars have made sense of the role of non-governmental organizations in the mass politics of global governance, articulating the three dimensions — *within*, *between*, and *beyond* — along which scholars have approached the question of the form and function of NGOs. I then turn to develop the theory

of the cartel NGO and the expectations that it generates for our empirical study of NGOs operating in the field of global politics. The chapter proceeds to explore the case study of Amnesty International and the emergent dynamics of cartelization.

And chapter four, “The New NIEO Moment,” moves finally to the macro-level of analysis, where I examine how scholars have made sense of the New International Economic Order and the dynamics of its rise and fall as “a monument to a failed protest” (Rothstein 1988). I then turn to develop the theory of the NIEO moment, before investigating its conditions in the case study of the Group of 77 from its heyday in the 1960s up to the present.

I conclude the dissertation with a discussion of the overall findings from each of the three papers, as well as the contributions that they collectively make to our broader understanding of the new politics of globalization. I finish by considering the limitations of the research set out in these three papers, and the potential new directions that they open up to redress them in future research.

2.

THE GLOBALIZATION BACKLASH REVISITED

INTRODUCTION

“The process of globalization is under attack.” On the two-year anniversary of Britain’s referendum on its membership of the European Union, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair (2018) delivered a warning to Chatham House on rising public resentment toward the aims and institutions of the international order. “The populist wave that’s upending Western politics shows no signs of abating,” Blair said.

Over the past decade, both scholars and policymakers have converged on this account of a “backlash” among voters that has given license to challenge the institutions which underpinned the past half-century of globalization: “Populism as a Backlash Against Globalization,” in the phrasing of Ferguson (2016). Some have explained this backlash as a natural reaction to a system that has “failed billions of people” (Elliot 2020). Others have challenged the logic of a reaction that could endanger its pillars of “peace and prosperity through exchange and connection” (De Soto 2016). Both sides of the scholarly debate, however, agree that a “revolt against globalization” is now underway (Judis 2018) — particularly in the electorates of advanced democracies such as the United States (Mansfield et al. 2021) and the United Kingdom (Crouch 2018) that once represented its chief advocates on the world stage.

From this premise, scholars of political economy have set to work investigating the drivers of the globalization backlash. One camp finds that the roots of this backlash are economic, as trade shocks (Dorn, Hansen, and Majlesi 2020), austerity drives (Fetzer 2019), and rapidly

increasingly inequality (Pastor and Veronesi 2018) undermine public confidence in the promise of international integration. Another camp finds that its roots are more cultural, as immigration and demographic shifts foster resentment (Cramer 2016), racism (Inglehart and Norris 2016), and calls for greater exclusion (Hooghe and Marks 2009) from the international system. Scholarly evidence thus appeared to lend support to the conventional wisdom by suggesting that “globalization shocks, often working through culture and identity, have played an important role in driving up support for populist movements” (Rodrik 2021, 133).

Despite this increased attention to the globalization backlash, few studies have interrogated its content, consistency, or conceptual meaning. Among those that purport to identify such a backlash, scholars have been limited by the source, scope, and structure of their data. In some cases, studies suggest increasing levels of voter apathy toward globalization with data that long pre-date the supposed backlash (Torgler 2008; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Kaya and Walker 2014; Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019). In others, studies assume the existence of the backlash by forcing respondents to take a position in a hypothetical trade-off — e.g. Do you want more immigration, or less? — and then coding the data along a spectrum from pro-globalization to anti-globalization (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Bearce and Tuxhorn 2017; Naoi 2020). In still others, studies have examined the pattern of voting for populist candidates like Donald Trump or Marine Le Pen, and interpreted ballot box decisions as evidence of backlash (Colantone and Stanig 2018; De Vries and Hobolt 2020). Across all three types of studies, scholars have been limited in their ability to directly test the backlash thesis at the level of voter preferences.

The issues in the existing literature thus not only cast doubt on the empirical basis of the backlash thesis. They also raise questions about the theoretical validity of the concept of “anti-globalization” (Bhagwati 2004) politics more broadly. Much of the research that has accompanied recent interest in the backlash, for example, focuses on voter preferences over trade, querying whether voters prefer more trade (“pro-globalization”, open, liberal) or less trade (“anti-globalization”, closed, protectionist). Yet trade policy is not one-dimensional; the amount of international trade is as critical to public opinion as the distribution of its gains across the voting population (Held and McGrew 2003). Operationalizing preferences over globalization with such a binary trade variable — more or less — has the effect of shoe-horning the theoretical framework of these studies to fit a narrative of rising anti-globalization sentiment.

Similar issues apply to studies that focus on voter behavior. Several recent studies of the globalization backlash have focused, for example, on the Brexit referendum (Pastor and Veronesi 2018; Frieden 2019; O'Rourke 2019; Curran and Eckhardt 2022), starting from the premise that the narrow victory of the 'Exit' campaign is evidence of anti-globalization sentiment across the British electorate. Since then, however, scholars have more closely examined the key drivers of the 'Exit' vote, exploring the role of unequal outcomes in the housing market (Adler and Ansell 2020), patterns of trade (Ballard-Rosa et al. 2021), flows of migration (Goodwin and Milazzo 2017), and the role of media (Gavin 2018), among others. By operationalizing the 'Exit' vote as a form of anti-globalization politics, then, scholars run the risk of blurring the line between demand- and supply-side political dynamics: 'Exit' voters may be voicing local concerns, even if the outcome of their vote has global implications; "populist" politics may be confused with a "popular" one.

The stakes of the study of the globalization backlash are therefore not only academic. The assumption of a popular backlash has also generated powerful normative claims over the direction of global governance reform in ways that frequently ignore voters' underlying preferences. Among populist parties that seek to carry the banner of the backlash, such an assumption has given apparent license to attack, undermine, or abandon the institutions of the liberal international order (Ikenberry 2018; Börzel and Zürn 2021; Steinberg 2022). Among their opponents, this assumption has activated a reflexive defense of globalization that overlooks both the motivations of supposed "backlashers" as well as the shades of discontent among those considered to be "pro-globalization" on the other side. The campaign for a second referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, for example, seized on the concept of "Bremorse" (Bellamy 2019) to advocate for a restoration of the status quo ex ante, without registering the shifting preferences over globalization that had taken place on both sides of the Brexit vote. In other words, the methodological issues in prevailing accounts of the globalization backlash have polarized the public debate on the question of pro- or anti-globalization, rather than the questions of which kind of globalization, how and for whom.

This chapter aims to provide more accurate assessment of those questions. What do people think about globalization? What is their evaluation of international institutions, their stated mission, and their performance? And what are their preferences over the direction? To answer these questions, I designed and executed two original surveys of 1,479 voters in the United

States and 1,600 voters in the United Kingdom. Moving beyond binary frameworks, I analyze patterns and trends in respondents' attitudes toward membership of international organizations, appetite for cooperation with other countries, and preferences over international agreements. I then visually depict these differences along key variables, such as party affiliation, and test which individual-level characteristics (such as gender, race, age, and educational attainment level) may be driving changes in perceptions of international organizations in standard OLS models using weights provided by the polling firm.

The survey findings in this chapter present a challenge to the backlash thesis. The survey respondents indeed report discontent with existing structures of globalization, but their criticism does not translate into a preference for disintegration. Rather, they prefer strong, if reformed, models of international cooperation. A majority of respondents not only support the US and UK governments dedicating greater attention to international coordination on key issues like health, environment, and the economy; they also report either changing their mind in the past five years to support *more* international coordination, or not changing their mind at all. In other words, neither static nor dynamic descriptions of the backlash find evidence in our survey data, casting doubt on its corollary that citizens are responsible for the populist turn against the institutions of the liberal international order (Walter 2021).

Revising the empirical record on the globalization backlash in this way helps to redefine the concept of 'anti-globalization' more broadly. Specifically, the findings of the survey return us to the "great debate" of the early 2000s suggest that the label of anti-globalization may be too broad of a conceptual brush (Held and McGrew 2007). Far from describing a mainstream political position, the anti-globalization label obscures the underlying criticisms that voters hold about the institutions, decision-making processes, and outcomes of global governance. Future research should therefore dive into the nuanced views that citizens have about globalization to understand better what voters actually want, and why their elected representatives might opt for non-representative positions on policies related to globalization.

The rest of the chapter is divided in eight sections and a brief concluding discussion. In the second section, I review the literature on the voter preferences over globalization and the recent efforts to document a backlash across advanced democracies. In the third, I develop a theory of voter preferences that I set out to test with descriptive data collected in my original surveys. In the fourth, I describe the data and the methods I deploy to analyze them. In the fifth and

sixth, I review the main findings from the surveys from the United States and United Kingdom, respectively. In the seventh, I move beyond description of the data to articulate a set of analytical claims about the potential mechanisms that may be driving support for cooperation or disintegration. In the eighth, I set out the empirical findings of my regression analysis regarding those potential mechanisms. I conclude with a discussion of implications for the field of globalization studies and the ongoing efforts to govern the backlash by policymakers and political parties across developed democracies.

LITERATURE

What do voters think about globalization? For many years, the prevailing view among scholars of international relations was that ordinary people did not think very much about globalization at all. Such accounts have tended to overlook the role of mass politics in favor of a narrower focus on elite policymakers and interest groups (Keohane 1984; Frieden 1991; Moravcsik 1997). The scholarly emphasis on these actors stems in part from an assessment of their dominant role vis-à-vis the broader electorate in the story of globalization and its evolution over time. In Barnett and Duval's landmark volume on *Power in Global Governance* (2004), for example, voter preferences make only a single appearance, in Kapstein's account of Florida's contested 2000 election (87). Yet the absence of voters in accounts of globalization also stems from the scholarly view of their limited capacity to make sense of the world system and its implications both near and far. According to Robert Dahl (1999), the "sheer complexity" of globalization puts it "beyond the immediate capacities" of voters to understand. The implications of Dahl's claim were not only empirical in nature, "that crucial foreign policy decisions are generally made by policy elites" (24). They were also theoretical, suggesting a highly simply model of voter preferences over globalization that would be limited to its most basic, immediate dimensions. "Can international organizations be democratic?" Dahl asked (19). "I argue that they cannot be," he responded, citing "cognitive and emotional obstacles to popular control over foreign policy decisions" (26).

It was the perception of a popular globalization "backlash" that first challenged scholars to revisit this view. Four months after the publication of Dahl's article, 40,000 protestors descended on the city of Seattle to shut down the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization in what became known as the first "globalization backlash" (Gill 2000; Smith

2001). The ‘Battle for Seattle’, as the protest came to be known, not only demonstrated the existence of highly evolved voter preferences over globalization, contradicting the claim of insurmountable “cognitive and emotional obstacles” (Dahl 1999, 26) to popular engagement with foreign policy decisions. It also demonstrated the potency of such popular engagement to set new terms for the policy elites long believed to be in the driver seat of globalization. In Seattle, President Bill Clinton conceded to the protestors’ basic premise, arguing that “the public must see and hear and, in a very real sense, actually join in the deliberations”.

Two decades later, the rise of anti-system politics across advanced democracies has again sparked interest in the globalization “backlash” as a popular phenomenon (Hopkin 2020). These scholars identify the roots of new populist movements to the system of globalization, tracing the cross-partisan rise of figures such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders to this emergent voter critique (Rodrik 2017). Some of these scholars have made the link between populism and the economic consequences of globalization’s design, explaining the backlash as a result of popular perceptions of being “left behind” by the new post-industrial economy (Colantone and Stanig 2018; Mansfield, Milner and Rudra 2021; Milner 2021) or adversely affected by economic shocks associated with rapid international integration (Funke et al. 2016; Autor et al. 2016). Other scholars have made sense of the backlash as a primarily cultural phenomenon. According to this account, the new “backlashers” are motivated by exclusionary attitudes developed in response to cultural globalization and the flows of immigration that were perceived to be driving it (Gidron and Hall 2017; Mutz 2018; Hays et al. 2005). In either case, voter grievances have come center stage in the story of populist politics and the direction of the international order more broadly (Destradi and Vüllers 2024).

Given its central role in present accounts of the disintegration of the international order, we might therefore ask: What is the existing evidence of a globalization backlash? How have scholars defined this theoretical concept? And how have they empirically measured its prevalence across the electorate? In answering these questions, I aim to resolve a puzzle set out by Stefanie Walter (2021) in her own interrogation of the backlash literature: “Studies that examine broad shifts in globalization-related public opinion over time are relatively rare and provide inconclusive evidence” (423). How, then, have scholars sought to sustain the backlash thesis? In what follows, I attempt to resolve this puzzle by identifying four main approaches to the measurement of the backlash thesis — (i) evaluations, (ii) trade-offs, (iii) more-or-less preferences, and (iv) vote choice. Each of these approaches has produced results to support the

backlash thesis. But all of them, I will argue, suffer from critical issues that motivate this chapter's effort to revisit it.

The first approach to the backlash has focused on performance evaluations of individual international organizations. The goal of these studies is to measure voters' judgments of key institutions of global governance, and to extrapolate from those judgments toward a broader conclusion about their views of globalization (Hobolt and Devries 2016; Bearce and Joliff 2019). Yet these studies suffer from both empirical and theoretical limitations. In the first instance, they must contend with a wide range of studies that demonstrate consistent confidence in organizations like the United Nations (Torgler 2008; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015), the World Bank, and the WTO (Kaya and Walker 2014). In the second, however, many of these studies rely on data that long pre-dates the present "populist revolt" (Goodhart 2017). Bearce and Joliff, for example, use assessments of international organizations to trace a steady decline in "globalization attitudes" (206), but they both rely on data from the 2013

International Social Survey, and demonstrate only a weak shift in such voter attitudes. The methodological problems with performance evaluations, however, run deeper than the data. Citizens of advanced democracies have consistently reported extremely low levels of confidence and trust in their respective national parliaments (Dalton 2005); those evaluations, though, rarely form a solid scholarly basis for conclusions of anti-democratic attitudes. The question remains, then, why harsh assessments of international organizations and their performance would qualify as a preference for disintegration rather than reform.

The second approach has shifted away from these large cross-sectional surveys and toward experimental designs that measure backlash through respondents' position on certain hypothetical trade-offs. Bearce and Tuxhorn (2017), for example, set out to measure the egocentricity of US voters' preferences over monetary policy — a trade-off between stimulating domestic growth or stabilizing the US dollar internationally — finding a strong bias toward domestic autonomy, which has interpreted as evidence of rising anti-globalization sentiment (Naoi 2020). Pevnick (2024), meanwhile, describes an "egalitarian backlash argument" to explain evolving attitudes to globalization in which voters must choose between permissive immigration policies and egalitarian income distributions. This approach to voter trade-offs has been reflected in broader survey designs such as the most recent wave of the World Values Survey (2017-2020), which asks respondents whether they would prioritize international organizations "being effective or being democratic" on a 10-point scale. These

studies have the advantage of producing clear results that allow scholars to examine voter variation in greater detail. Their “coarse informational treatments” (Naoi 2020, 334) and curious proposed trade-off, however, “stack the deck” (335) toward the conclusion of a globalization backlash, without permitting for a more nuanced or detailed model of voter preferences.

The third approach seeks to examine globalization attitudes more directly by focusing on variables such as immigration and trade that are considered to constitute it. Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010), for example, set out to identify the roots of nativist immigration attitudes in the United States, designing a survey experiment that assigns skill levels to respondents and then asks them whether “the US should allow more *highly skilled (low-skilled)* immigrants from other countries to come and live here” (7). Scheve and Slaughter (2001), in their own study of mass attitudes to globalization, focus on surveys that query respondents to answer whether they prefer a policy of “expanded trade” (17) with foreign countries or a policy of restricted trade. These studies, too, offer a rich account of the potential covariates of the globalization backlash. Yet they are unable to prove the existence or extent of that backlash across the populations they analyze, as questions of more-or-less fail to capture the multi-dimensional preferences that relate to globalization policy: respondents may prefer, for example, the combination of expanded trade with expanded fiscal support to those affected by trade, just as they may prefer more restricted levels of both. In its effort to isolate a cause of anti-globalization sentiment, therefore, the third approach does not permit these detailed descriptive portraits of voter preferences over globalization.

The fourth and most popular approach to the measure of backlash is to focus on vote choice. These scholars extrapolate directly from ballot box support for ‘populist’ candidates and causes to prove the existence of a globalization backlash (see Scheiring et al. 2024 for a meta-analysis). A wide range of studies have documented the rise of ‘globalization-skeptic’ parties (see Walter 2021), with one recent study documenting the decline of party-political support for ‘liberal internationalist’ positions by almost a half since the 1990s along (Trubowitz and Burgoon). But few studies have sought to disentangle these supply-side dynamics from the demand-side preferences that are assumed to fuel them. Some scholars have addressed this methodological issue head-on, arguing that this choice is warranted because of the strength of supply-side signals on issues of international integration (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). Far more, however, have gone “in search of the causes of the globalization backlash” (Angolin et al.

2024) rather than exploring the content or consistency of backlash preferences across the electorate. Before turning to questions of variation, then, this chapter aims to revisit the backlash thesis, interrogate its underlying assumptions, and develop a new set of theoretical expectations that can be explored in the original data that follows.

THEORY

What, then, is the globalization backlash thesis? What are its underlying expectations for voter attitudes? And upon revisiting it, what other preferences might we expect voters to hold in a conjuncture defined by the rapid transformation of the international order (Slaughter and LaForge 2021)? In this section, I attempt to provide a revised theory of the globalization backlash that challenges the conventional wisdom regarding a mass wave of anti-globalization sentiment in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom. My goal is to generate a series of descriptive expectations that build from prior investigation of voter behavior in order to motivate the analysis of the original surveys that follows.

I begin by looking at the question of voter discontent. Existing literature may not have provided conclusive evidence of a “backlash” against globalization (Walter 2021). Nonetheless, the literature provides strong reasons to expect that many voters do not hold neutral assessments of global governance institutions (Bearce and Tuxhorn 2017). Recent years have seen the question of international integration become increasingly contested since the days of the “globalization consensus” (Rodrik 2008; Wade 2010). The emergence of globalization skeptics among party leaders in advanced democracies (Funke and Zhong 2022), the visibility of their critique in the annals of global governance (Yang 2021), and the subsequent decline of international organizations (Debre and Dijkstra 2023) suggests that an increasing polarization in the globalization debate. This trend leads to the first descriptive expectation of this study, closely in line with the underlying assumptions of the globalization backlash thesis: *Voters are discontent with international institutions* — and increasingly so: given the increasing politicization of the global governance system, we might expect voters to report a growing sense of dissatisfaction with their performance.

What might rising voter discontent mean for their broader preferences over the direction of globalization? The backlash thesis suggests a clear answer: discontent is driving a preference

for disintegration. Much of the existing literature remains caught here. Several studies have seized on in-or-out referenda like Brexit to examine the origins of the globalization backlash (Goodwin and Milazzo 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018). Others have examined the relationship between perspectives on exit in one country and preferences for exit in another (De Vries 2017; Walter 2020), measuring the contagion effect at both demand and supply sides of mass politics (Bischof and Wagner 2019). Yet the focus on votes to exit — real or hypothetical — may obscure preferences for reform, transformation, or reconstruction of international institutions; it is possible, for example, to favor EU membership and also to oppose the European Union’s fiscal policies. New research suggests that such reform-minded preferences may be more prevalent than previously thought. Kentikelenis and Voeten (2021), for example, examine the vast corpus of speeches at the United Nations to show — *contra* the backlash thesis — that threats of exit have become increasingly rare, even as the topic of globalization has become increasingly contested. Transposing insight to the demand side of voter preferences yields a second expectation for our descriptive portrait of the United States and the United Kingdom: *Voter discontent does not necessarily translate into a preference for disintegration.*

One of the underlying assumptions of the backlash thesis is that — beyond the narrow scope of actually existing international organizations — voters have grown increasingly skeptical of the principle of international cooperation as they have moved in an “isolationist” direction (Colantone et al. 2025). Since the first articulation of that thesis in the Brexit referendum of 2016, however, the wave of anti-system politics (Hopkin 2020) has in many cases begun to recede, as in the virtual disappearance of calls to exit the European Union in places like France, Italy, and Greece, with “public opinion scholarship suggesting that Europeans broadly interpret Brexit as a cautionary fable rather than an encouraging blueprint to follow” (Ganderson 2024, 1199). Meanwhile, a new wave of more cosmopolitan “counter-movements” has flowed in its place (Roth 2018). Across advanced democracies, new mass movements have emerged to demand stronger forms of international cooperation to address issues like climate, the economy, and global health — particularly in the context of Covid-19, which revealed the interconnected nature of domestic health systems across the world. The explosion of school strikes (Thunberg 2019), the rise of the Green New Deal (Aronoff et al 2019; Pettifor 2017), and the increasing popular mobilization around the annual meetings of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, for example, suggest that citizens may be even more strongly in favor of international engagement than the politicians they elect. These emergent trends thus

point to a third expectation to be explored in the data: *Voters demand stronger forms of international engagement*, rather than isolation.

The terms of such international engagement, however, are not necessarily uncontested. As the Brexit slogan “take back control” suggests, voters in advanced democracies have raised concerns about the distribution of decision-making power in the present system of globalization. Many scholars have interpreted that slogan as a clear signal of anti-globalization sentiment (Goodwin and Milazzo 2017; Crouch 2018; Kriesi 2020). But the observation of globalization’s “Golden Straitjacket” (Rodrik 2000) has long generated expectations that voters would call for greater say over the distribution of its gains, as in longstanding observation of a correlation between open economies and bigger governments to offset the costs of their integration (Rodrik 1998, 2002; Garen and Trask 2005). Indeed, scholars like Dani Rodrik have warned for decades that a ‘neoliberal’ or ‘hyper’ (Rodrik 2019) form of globalization would shift power away from ordinary citizens and toward supranational organizations and multinational corporations (Keohane 2003), inflaming discontent across a disempowered electorate. We might therefore expect to find evidence of this anxiety in this chapter’s exploration of voter preferences, generating a fourth and final expectation for our descriptive analysis of the original surveys in the United States and the United Kingdom: *Voters demand a more democratic form of globalization*.

Taken together, these theoretical expectations suggest a multi-dimensional model of voter preferences over globalization. Dominant accounts of the backlash have focused on binary preferences — Leave or Remain, Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton — that impoverish and over-simplify our understanding of voter attitudes to international organizations, governments’ international engagements, and the terms on which they do so. A more holistic snapshot of voter preferences, my theory suggests, is likely to reveal a more complex, and perhaps even contradictory, picture of the demand-side dynamics in advanced democracies. I turn now to the descriptive data that may generate such a picture.

DATA & METHODS

To interrogate the empirical foundations of the backlash thesis, I conducted two original surveys. The first survey focused on 1,477 likely voters in the United States using a web panel of respondents developed by survey firm Data for Progress. Data for Progress employs quota random sampling amongst registered voters using quotas on age, gender, race, ethnicity, and education. The weights are then applied using voter models from a commercial voter file and third-party turnout modelling with the main weighting variables being age, gender, education, geography, race, and 2020 vote recall. Respondents are recruited via a web panel. The survey received ethics approval from Oxford University's CUREC office with approval reference #C1A_21_017:C1A_21_023.

The survey focused on the United States as a 'most likely' case of the globalization backlash. Recent commentary has posited this backlash on both the supply and demand sides of US politics. On the former, recent studies have set out to document the rise of anti-globalization positions by candidates on both the left and the right of the US political spectrum (Stiglitz 2018; Frieden 2019), with both left-wing candidates like Bernie Sanders as well as right-wing candidates like Donald Trump aligning in their opposition to policies like the Trans-Pacific Partnership that seek to deepen the country's integration into the global economy. On the latter, a wide range of scholarship has sought to make sense of Donald Trump's election through the prism of the globalization backlash (e.g. Scheve and Slaughter 2018), both for its economic consequences as well as its cultural ones (Cramer 2016).

Yet the United States is not only a 'most likely' case for the study of the globalization backlash. As several scholars have pointed out in their recent accounts, it is also a 'critical case' (Baskarada 2014). The economic power and institutional authority that the United States carries onto the global stage mean that its patterns of voter behavior exercise outsize influence on the direction of the multilateral system at large. Both the perception and reality of a new "America First" current in US politics may risk the contagion of backlash in countries that similarly seek to pursue their unilateral actions in the international arena (Walter 2020; Giani and Méon 2021; Haass 2021). Such a dynamic not only applies to dominant powers across the Atlantic; as many scholars have recently observed, 'non-Western' powers may interpret the US backlash against globalization to reflect both an opportunity and an urgent necessity to assert their own national

interests against the norms and institutions that have governed the process of globalization (Öniş and Kutlay 2020). The first survey that I examine in this chapter thus focuses on the United States as the key to understanding the dynamics of backlash around the world.

The US survey is divided into three main sections. One section is focused on issues: Do respondents believe that the United States should dedicate more or less attention to working with other countries on environmental, economic, health issues respectively? The goal of these questions is both to capture a cross-section of attitudes toward international cooperation, as well as to examine respondents' self-assessment of their dynamics: the survey also asks respondents how these preferences have changed over the past five years, as the politics of “backlash” has reached the White House. Another section is focused on evaluations: How well do respondents believe that globalization is working for them, their party, their country, and their neighbor nations — and what do respondents believe should be done about it? The goal of this section is not only to capture assessments of globalization as a potential driver of the backlash, but also to identify the actors that respondents hold responsible for globalization's performance. A third section is focused on institutions: What do respondents think about institutions like the UN, the WHO, and USMCA, and how might those views have changed over time? A growing literature has focused on exit from multilateral institution as the main evidence for a growing backlash (e.g. Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019), but few studies have tested for the presence of a withdrawal mandate among the voting public. I examine these preferences not by asking respondents “in” or “out”, but with textured questions that allow for the expression of more programmatic positions on the trajectory of reform in the multilateral system.

Building from these US data, I turn to my original survey from the United Kingdom. In July 2021, I conducted a survey of 1,600 respondents through the annual UniOM Scheme conducted by polling firm YouGov, cleared by the University of Oxford's CUREC office with approval reference #C1A_21_017:C1A_21_023. The omnibus survey, like the Data for Progress web panel, is sampled and weighted to be both nationally, politically, and representationally representative of adults in Great Britain, including weights that account for pasts and political attention in order to capture non-voting residents across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

The UK offers another ‘most likely’ case for the globalization backlash and an ideal complement to the US data given the simultaneous timing of its populist “revolt” (Goodhart 2017) in the EU referendum in June 2016. Together with the election of Donald Trump, the Brexit referendum has been widely interpreted as a key event both in the national story of the UK’s globalization backlash (Inglehart and Norris 2019), as well as in the broader European story of rising skepticism toward the process of European integration (Kriesi 2020). The combination of the UK as a ‘most likely’ and — through these contagion effects on the European continent (Walter 2021) — ‘critical case’ provides strong motivation for a closer examine of its voter attitudes.

Following YouGov guidelines for its UniOM scheme, the survey is designed to test whether the results from the US survey hold across cases, with near-identical questions about attitudes towards globalization. These include questions about respondents’ evaluations of the existing international order, including assessments of responsibility for its potential failures. These include questions about respondents’ underlying support for the principle of international engagement on key “global challenges” like climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as questions about respondents’ approach to potential reforms to “improve the existing system” of globalization. Together, these questions allow not only to test the generalization of the results of the US survey, but also to evaluate the four key expectations put forward in the previous section.

My methods are both descriptive and analytical in nature. Existing research on globalization attitudes has relied heavily on survey data that predate the backlash it aims to capture; as argued in the literature review, these constraints often yield impartial and misleading portraits of globalization preferences in advanced democracies. As such, the first method is purely descriptive: the goal is to present a more honest and holistic depiction of voters’ views of globalization, its impact, and its direction. Building from this descriptive analysis, I then make use of OLS regression analysis to explore both key demographic covariates of these descriptive phenomena as well as the potential mechanisms that may be driving voters toward a preference for disintegration or re-integration of the international order. In this way, the analysis aims to contribute to the growing literature on the economic and cultural determinants of globalization attitudes (Angolin et al. 2025) across a range of key policy areas such as health, environment, and living standards.

FINDINGS FROM THE UNITED STATES

This section presents the descriptive findings from the first of the two original surveys conducted for this chapter, organized by the expectations that motivate the analysis of this chapter. First, I present the findings on respondents' views of international organizations and the self-assessment of their evolution over time. Second, I turn to the underlying preferences over international engagement in key policy areas. Third, I explore voter attitudes over the direction of globalization and potential avenues for the reform of the international order. I then complement the presentation of the US findings with additional UK evidence, before turning to a more detailed analysis of the potential mechanisms that may be driving these trends.

INSTITUTIONS

To revisit the globalization backlash thesis, I begin by evaluating voter preferences over international organizations. These institutions occupy a large space in the literature, where globalization preferences are frequently operationalized through trust, confidence, and performance assessments of organizations like the United Nations. However, the conclusions of this strand of work are mixed, with several studies pointing to consistent popular support (Torgler 2008; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Kaya and Walker 2014), and others suggesting a steady decline (Bearce and Joliff 2019). The challenge thus remains to assess voters' present perceptions of international organizations, and whether those perceptions are linked to a preference for disintegration.

Understanding public opinion on international organizations (IOs) is important for inferring broader perceptions on globalization. IO membership represents a country's willingness and ability to influence international politics, a comprehension of global culture and its importance in multilateralism, and a commitment to embedding itself in partner-country networks (Gygli et al. 2019, 557–58). Since IO participation is a *de jure* measure of globalization, legally recognized and highly visible on the surface of global politics, it is where citizens are most likely to observe how their country acts in the international system. The number of IOs a

country is a member of is also frequently used to measure political globalization in globalization indices (Dreher et al. 2012, 527). Approximating public opinion on IO membership and preferences for a state's departure or reform of a given IO is vital to understanding undercurrents and patterns in perspectives on globalization more broadly. In analyzing where likely voters stand on IO membership, and if their opinions have become more or less critical of the IOs after a period of rising populism, we may construct a useful proxy for their relative levels of satisfaction with globalization and their country's place in it.

The findings here thus aim to evaluate both the first and second expectations set out above — on discontent and disintegration — with reference to these institutions. As a cross-sectional survey of the US electorate, the data are limited in their ability to capture longitudinal dynamics of voter attitudes to international organizations as they evolve over time. Nonetheless, the survey was designed to capture subjective evaluations of those changes, offering a useful window into voters' own views about the directions in which their opinions are evolving, and how they would like those views to be communicated publicly about them through such an instrument of data collection. Specifically, the survey asked voters to consider how, over the last five years, their views have or have not changed vis-à-vis three of the most salient international organizations in the US context. In line with prevailing views on the globalization backlash, my survey findings support the argument that electorates are critical of the institutional manifestations of globalization — and perceive that dissatisfaction to be growing over time.

As shown in Figure 1, in the past five years, between 34 and 43 percent of survey respondents have become more critically predisposed towards the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) that replaced the North America Free Trade Agreement in 2018. In contrast, less than one in four respondents became more supportive of these institutions, with the remainder reporting no change in views. These three IOs were selected and tested with my survey sample because they ought to be indicative of wider trends in public opinion on globalization. The United Nations is perhaps the IO *par excellence*, inclusive to all established states in the international system and the platform from which their leaders communicate respective vision of global governance; (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015, 453); the WHO, a specialized agency within the United Nations, both manages the coordination between states on the critical issue of global health, and has come under recent criticism for the efforts to do so in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic,

increasing its relative salience at the time the survey was conducted in September 2021; and the USMCA is the trade agreement between Canada, Mexico, and the United States that directly affects the most North Americans at the level of their pocketbooks and, for millions of US Americans across industries such as agriculture and manufacturing, their employment prospects (Bitar 2024).

FIGURE 1: “THINKING ABOUT THE LAST FIVE YEARS, IN WHICH DIRECTION HAVE YOUR VIEWS CHANGED?” PROPORTION OF ANSWERS FOR EACH INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTION.

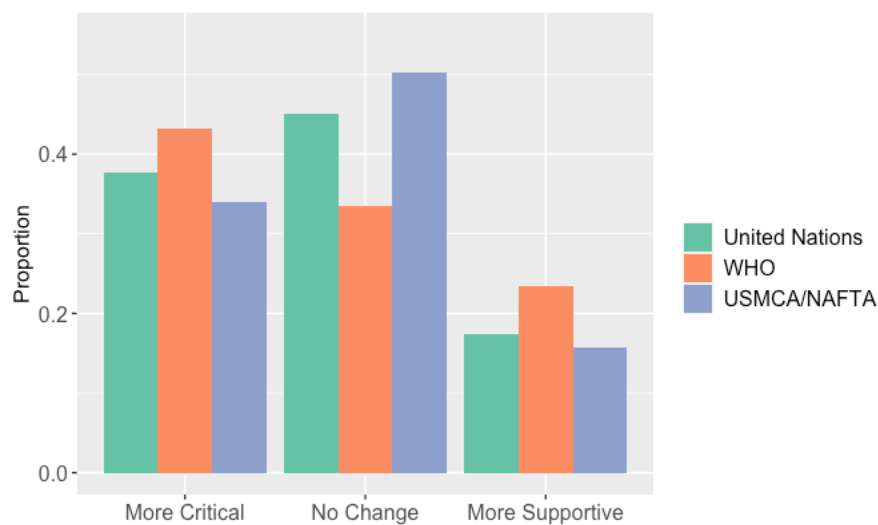


Figure 1 shows the weighted proportion of respondents who reported they had become “more critical,” “no change,” or “more supportive” of each respective IO in the last five years.

My initial findings in Figure 1 therefore point to rising discontent with international institutions, with only a small minority of respondents reporting that their support for them has grown over the course of the last five years of rising populism in the United States. However, these negative attitudes may be linked to diverse and potentially contradictory underlying preferences for the appropriate response to perceived failures of these international institutions. What, then, are respondents’ preferences over engagement with the institutional architecture of globalization? Rather than simply propose a binary option of “Remain” or “Exit”, the US survey asked respondents to evaluate a series of possibilities for such engagement. The design of the survey first primed respondents with the mission of each institution: “maintain international peace and security” (United Nations), “promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable” (World Health Organization), and “promote trade between the United States, Mexico and Canada” (USMCA). Respondents were then asked to state their preference

between five different possibilities: (1) The US should leave this institution and no longer pursue this mission, (2) The US should leave this institution and pursue this mission on its own, (3) The US should leave this institution and build a new international institution to pursue this mission, (4) The US should stay in this institution but reform its mission, and (5) The US should stay in this institution and leave its mission as it is, as well as a sixth option for respondents who preferred to say “Don’t know.” The goal of this design was to help distinguish not only between the actually existing institution and its stated mission, but also to engage voters in the actual range of options available to the policymakers that represent them, who frequently choose to advocate for reforms rather than the more extreme option to exit from the institution or abandon its mission all together. The design of the survey randomized the ordering of these possibilities in order to reduce any potential sequence biases (Perreault 1975) in the responses that I collected.

Looking now to Figure 2, one interpretation of the descriptive findings would seem to support the expectation that voters’ discontent has not translated into a preference for disintegration. Against the expectations generated by the voters’ self-assessment of increasingly critical attitudes toward international organizations, a roughly two-thirds majority of US voters surveyed for this chapter supports staying inside them. The design of the survey allows us to divide that group of respondents into two distinct groups. One group, accounting for approximately a third of the overall sample, prefers to stick to the status quo inside these international institutions. Yet the data also suggest the existence of a bloc of voters that is frequently overlooked in existing accounts of the globalization backlash — namely, the third of respondents who prefer to stay in these international institutions, but on the condition of their reform. As such a position falls outside the boundaries of the standard methodology for measuring the backlash — focused narrowly on the question of entry or exit — these data help to update the existing model of voter preferences from the binary of pro- or anti-globalization to one of ‘alter-globalization’ (Pleyers 2010), calling for a closer examination of voter attitudes to global governance reform.

FIGURE 2: PROPORTION TABLE ON RESPONDENTS' PREFERENCES VIS-À-VIS INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

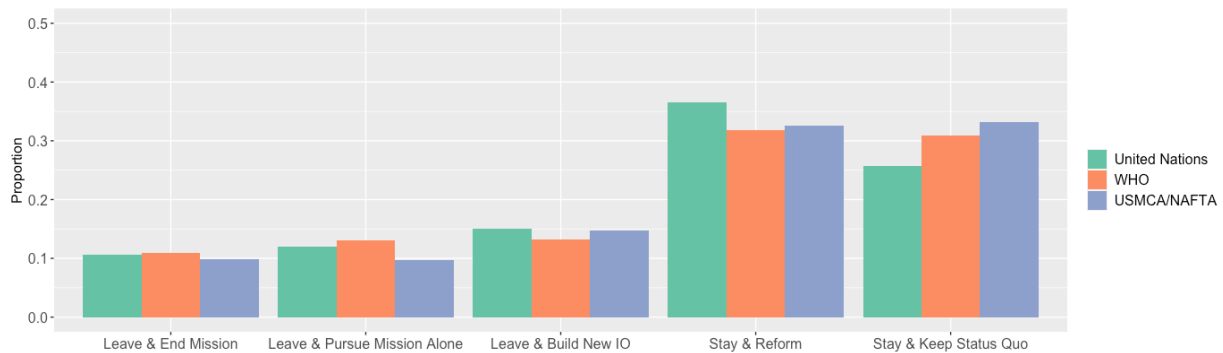


Figure 2 displays the weighted proportion of respondents based on preferences over US membership in each IO.

Advocates of the backlash thesis, however, may draw greater attention to the final third of the US respondents. There, excluding respondents reporting ignorance¹, I find that a sizable proportion (34 percent) of US voters prefer to exit established global governance institutions. A superficial reading of the evidence would point to a minority, albeit vocal, section of ‘disintegrationist’ attitudes across the US electorate. A closer inspection of the data, however, offers important nuance, illustrating the importance of survey designs that allow for more detailed evaluations of voter attitudes. Only about 10 percent of respondents both prefer the US to leave institutions like the UN, WHO and USMCA, as well as to abandon their stated missions to “maintain international peace and security,” “promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable,” and “promote trade” between North American neighbors, respectively. Across the distinct questions about these individual institutions, another 10-15 percent of respondents agreed on the importance of these underlying missions, but preferred for the US to pursue a more unilateral approach to deliver them, plausibly echoing the ‘America First’ policy of the Trump administration while rejecting a purely isolationist impulse to abandon international engagements across the key issues managed by these international institutions.

¹12.0 percent of respondents reported “don’t know” for the question about whether their views have changed on the UN, 9.9 percent of participants reported “don’t know” for the same question on the WHO, and 20.2 percent of respondents reported “don’t know” for the same question on USMCA.

The fifth group of respondents, however, represents an even more theoretically nuanced challenge to the backlash thesis. This group, forming over 10 percent of the total sample, believes that the US should leave the particular institution that is currently managing missions such as global peace, health, and trade. Yet they express a preference for the US to build a new international institution to pursue that mission — thus revealing an entirely new set of voter preferences for the radical reconstruction of the international order, rather than its dissolution. The data presented in Figure 2 thus challenges the assumption of a wholesale globalization backlash. Rather, it suggests that the backlash thesis fails to account for a wide range of preferences for revamping global governance arrangements while maintaining underlying principles of international engagement, a finding which holds across all three main policy areas set out in the survey.

ENGAGEMENT

The previous section elucidated the nuanced perspectives that US respondents hold towards key international institutions, suggesting the need to decouple voters' evaluations of actually existing organizations from their underlying preferences over international institutional arrangements. If the findings appeared to confirm this chapter's first expectation — namely, that voters are discontent with the operation of international institutions — this section turns to the second expectation. Specifically, this section seeks to revisit the assumption of the backlash thesis that voters have become increasingly 'isolationist', hostile to the principles and practice of international engagement. As I have argued above, operationalizing voter attitudes through assessments of international organizations offers only a partial, and potentially biased, picture; as such organizations are frequently criticized, blamed or scape-goated for domestic failures of national governments (Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2019; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2023), respondents may be motivated to report strongly negative views of those organizations that do not necessarily reflect their attitudes toward the ideal form and function of the international order. Investigating these perspectives may therefore generate more accurate indicators for the measurement of 'anti-globalization' backlash.

The US survey therefore asks respondents to evaluate whether the US government should “devote more attention or less attention to working with other countries” — both as a general

principle, and on specific policy areas that may be relevant to their everyday lives and enduring political concerns. I focus specifically on three main policy issues, each of which was selected for the relevance of its international dimension. The first is the environment, an issue area of intense contestation in the United States over both the intensity and scale of government engagement (Jotzo et al 2018; MacNeil and Paterson 2020). The second is living standards, similarly subject to a wide-ranging national debate not only over the terms of international engagement like economic tariffs (Stiglitz 2018), but also — as made clear by President Trump’s leaked margin note to his presidential speech at the G20, arguing simply that “TRADE IS BAD” (Woodward 2018) — over whether to engage internationally at all. The third issue is infectious disease, selected for its salience through the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, which sparked a major national debate about how the US should cooperate on issues of global health (Rutledge 2020), or — as the Trump administration’s “medical populism” (Lasco 2020) and associated withdrawal from the World Health Organization suggests — whether to go it alone entirely. For each policy issue, I ask voters to report whether or not their views have changed over the course of the past half-decade of these major national debates. While such cross-sectional questions are an imperfect measurement of the dynamics of US public opinion, they offer important insight into voters’ understanding of their own evolution on the key issues of global governance today.

I present the descriptive findings from these four questions in Figure 3. The first question offered a general assessment of voters’ views of international engagement: “Do you think that the US government should devote more attention or less attention to working with other countries, or is the current approach about right?” After this general question, respondents were given three issue-specific questions, with the order randomized throughout the sample. Respondents were then asked: “On each issue, do you think that the US government should devote more attention or less attention to working with other countries?” Responses ranged from “Far less attention” to “Far more attention” on a 5-point scale.

The overall picture appears to confirm the second expectation of the theory set out in the section above on the enduring preferences for international engagement. Against the assumption of the backlash thesis that US respondents prefer to distance their country from the international community, Figure 3 below shows that US survey participants overwhelmingly want the US to cooperate *more* with other countries on a variety of issues. In total, nearly 80 percent of respondents want the US to have the same or more multilateral engagement with other

countries. Pooling across the different areas of cooperation, an average of 22.3 percent of respondents want the current level of attention, a mean of 24.5 percent desire slightly more attention, and an average of 34.5 percent want far more attention on multilateral cooperation, for a total of 81.3 percent.

FIGURE 3: MORE OR LESS ATTENTION ON US ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

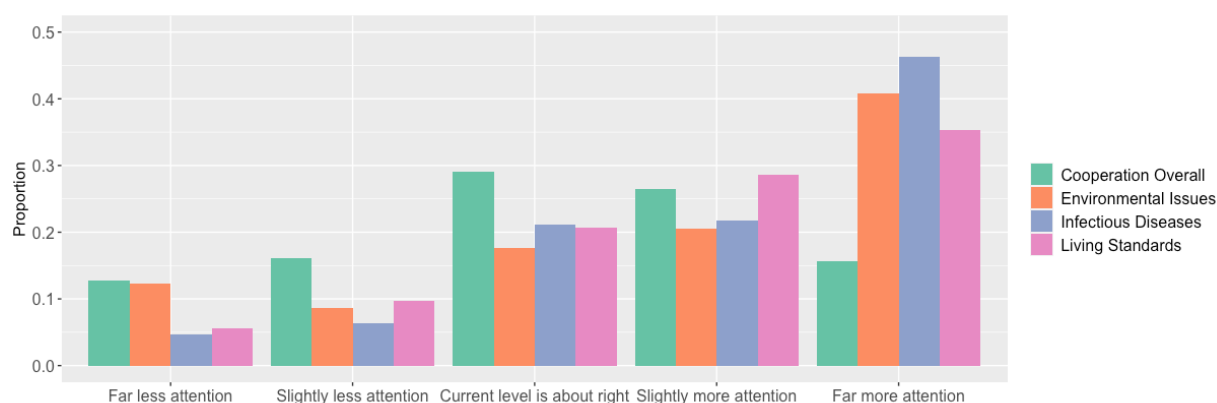


Figure 3 presents the weighted proportion of respondents' self-reported preferences for more or less attention on US engagement with other countries overall and by policy type.

A closer examination of these descriptive data provides additional insight into the political dynamics of voter attitudes toward globalization. As Figure 3 reveals, support for international engagement is far weaker when respondents were asked for a general assessment of its merits versus when they were asked about issue-specific engagement. In methodological terms, this finding suggests that globalization preferences may be poorly captured by highly generalized questions, which can trigger partisan responses to buzzwords like “globalization” — and may therefore account for why previous studies overstate the extent of the globalization backlash. When respondents were asked about specific issues such as health, environment, and the economy, they report much higher levels of support for international engagement across all three issue areas. While the general idea of globalization may be vulnerable to supply-side polarization, the findings in Figure 3 suggest that voters maintain a strong underlying demand for international engagement when they move past such generalizations to engage with the particular issues at stake in the operation of global governance.

The breakdown by issue area offers support for this proposed demand-side dynamic. The survey was commissioned in September 2021, shortly after the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States, when the lethal consequences of a failing global health system

became apparent to millions of citizens across the country and around the world. Figure 3 suggests that the experience of the pandemic may be reflected on the high levels of support for international cooperation on fighting infectious diseases. On this issue in particular, roughly two-thirds of respondents reported a demand for more attention by the US government for engagement with other countries. In other words, when globalization moves out of the conceptual realm and into the concrete, voters appear overwhelmingly supportive of international engagement as a method to respond to their local needs.

We might then ask: How do voters perceive their support for issue-based international engagement changing over time? The globalization backlash thesis offers a clear answer: voters should report becoming less supportive over time as they trend in an anti-globalization direction. Yet the relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and high reported levels of support for global health cooperation suggest that voters may have moved in the opposite direction. For this reason, the survey asked respondents: “Thinking about the last five years and U.S. international action for each issue, in which direction have your views changed?” For each question, then, respondents could then choose between three answers: (1) “I have not changed my mind”, (2) “I have changed my mind to think that the US should devote more attention to working with other countries on this issue”, and (3) “I have changed my mind to think that the US should devote less attention to working with other countries on this issue”, as well as a fourth option for “Don’t know.”

Figure 4 presents the findings from these questions. Contrary to the expectations of the backlash thesis, few respondents report changing their mind to want *less* attention on these areas of cooperation. Rather, a majority of respondents report no change in perspective on the key issues of global governance, and a large share (27.6-42.9 percent) supported providing more attention to cooperation on all the issues of interest. Even as the supply-side call grows for international disengagement, then, the findings in Figure 4 appear to confirm the second expectation about a growing ‘cooperation mandate’ across the US electorate.

FIGURE 4: “THINKING ABOUT THE LAST FIVE YEARS AND U.S. INTERNATIONAL ACTION FOR EACH ISSUE, IN WHICH DIRECTION HAVE YOUR VIEWS CHANGED?”

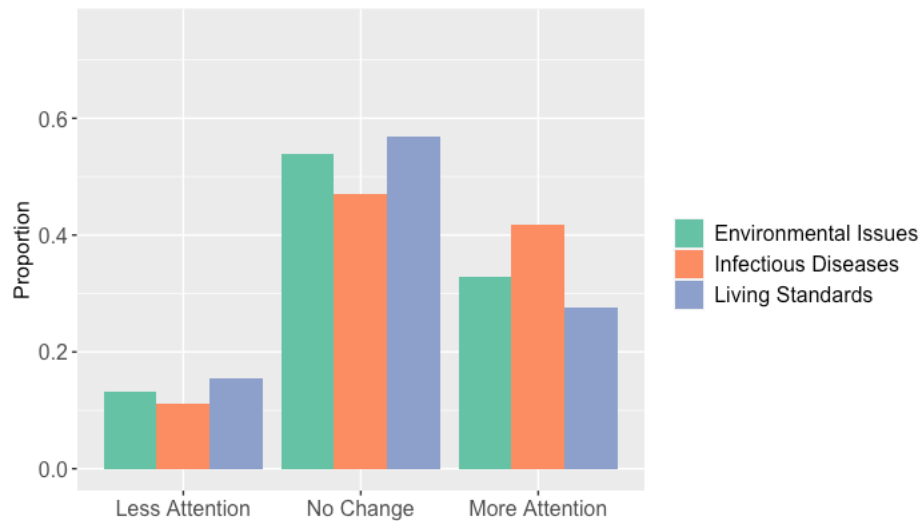


Figure 4 measures the weighted proportion of respondents who report changing their mind (or not) to want more or less attention on US cooperation with other countries by policy type in the past five years.

DIRECTIONS

The previous section provided strong evidence of a cooperation mandate among US voters. But on what terms? Descriptive findings presented earlier in this chapter show that a majority of respondents favor the reform or reconstruction of the institutions that manage globalization — whether through or outside of existing organizations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization. On what political basis should such a reconstruction take place? Who do voters — long perceived to be afflicted by “cognitive and emotional obstacles” (Dahl 1999, 26) in their understanding of globalization (Lippmann 1955) — perceive to be its political protagonists?

To answer these questions, the US survey queried respondents’ views about which actor would do most to improve the existing system of globalization. Respondents were given four possible options for the direction of globalization reform. One option would empower national governments previously constrained by the ‘golden straitjacket’ (Rodrik 2000). Another option

would empower experts that have come under concerted attack by the rise of populism in advanced democracies (Clarke and Newman 2017; Merkley 2020). And a third option would devolve power to “citizens and communities” themselves to determine the direction of globalization. A fourth option was provided to respondents who believed that “the existing system of globalization does not need to be improved” in order to account for favorable preferences toward the status quo.

The findings are presented in Figure 5 below. The dominant response appears to confirm the fourth and final expectation of this chapter: survey participants overwhelmingly reported that they prefer giving fellow citizens more control over globalization in order to improve it. 47.8 percent of respondents want citizens and communities to have more control, while 24.0 percent wish experts and 15.6 percent wish governments had more control over globalization’s outcomes. The lowest proportion of respondents — a mere 12.5 percent of the total sample — believe that globalization needs no improvements, and therefore that no group needs more power or control. Such a small proportion of respondents who support the status quo provides further support to the motivating assumption of the globalization backlash, namely that citizens are discontent with the existing structure of globalization. Yet they also suggest that voters’ discontent is not necessarily directed at international organizations; rather, the relatively small proportion of voters who prefer to devolve greater power to their governments suggests that popular discontent with globalization may itself be a function of a domestic crisis of democratic representation. Taken together with the results in the first subsection on institutions, the findings of this chapter suggest that voters in the overwhelming prefer to *democratize* globalization — devolving stronger forms of control to citizens and communities — than to disintegrate it, or retain its status quo.

FIGURE 5: PROPORTION TABLE ON WHO SHOULD BE GIVEN MORE CONTROL TO “IMPROVE GLOBALIZATION”

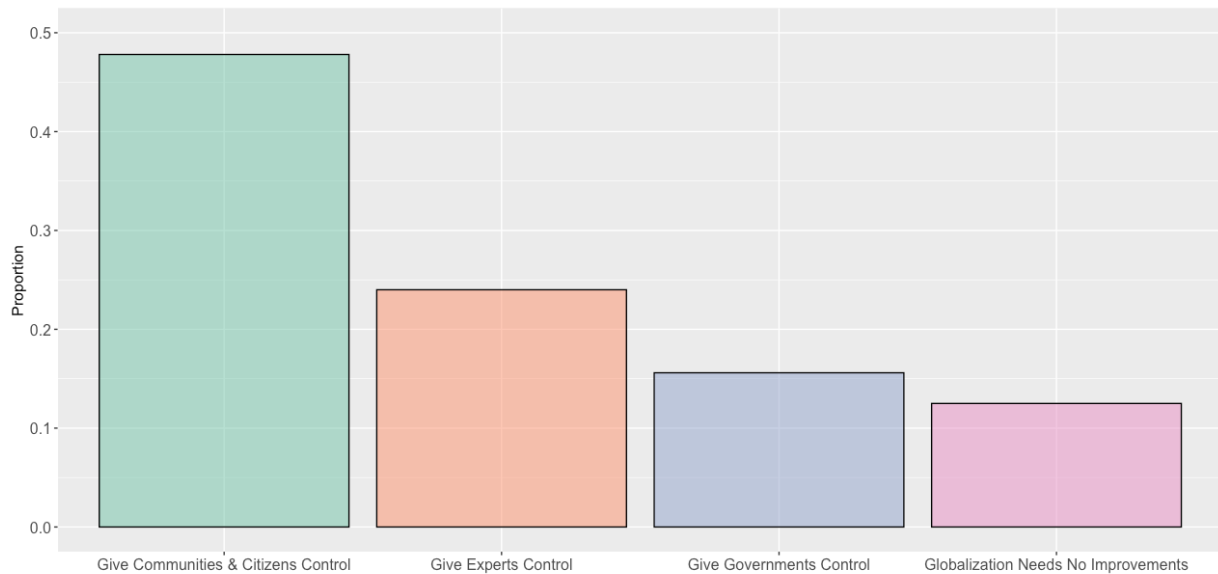


Figure 5 measures the weighted proportion of respondents for each answer to the question of “Which of the following would do the MOST to improve the existing system of globalization?”

These descriptive findings help to reveal voter attitudes toward the process of globalization. But what about its outcomes? Who do voters feel should “win” from globalization? And what might this tell us about the rise of populism and its association with a globalization backlash? To answer these questions, I designed a follow-up question about the potential constituencies who might stand to gain from a hypothetical negotiation over an international agreement. Who should benefit from these negotiations? I asked survey respondents to rank four options: (i) workers in the United States, (ii) business owners in the United States, (iii) workers in foreign countries, and (iv) business owners in foreign countries. This aimed to examine how much national boundaries determine preferences for the gains from globalization over/versus class-based considerations that may have assumed greater salience due to globalization’s perceived erosion of those borders (Bieler et al. 2008; Anner 2011). In Figure 6, I tallied the responses to show the proportion of respondents who ranked each category either first or second, providing a highly general picture of the overall distribution of rank preferences.

FIGURE 6: PROPORTION TABLE ON WHO SHOULD BENEFIT FROM AN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT

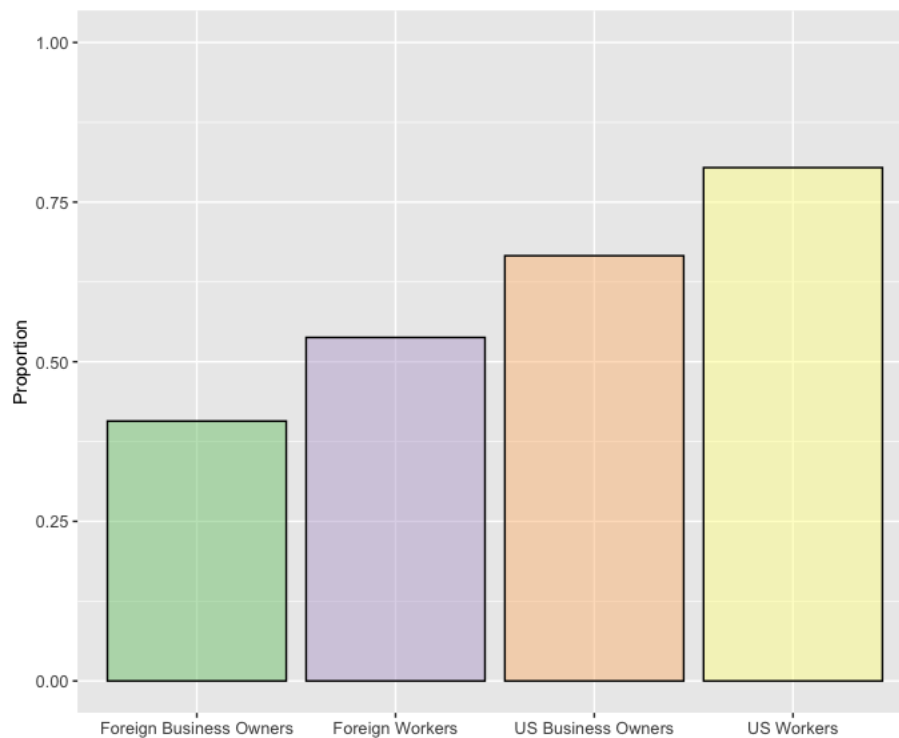


Figure 6 measures the proportion of respondents who ranked each category EITHER first OR second in their overall ranking of which group should benefit most from the agreement.

The findings suggest that a majority of US voters prefer for US workers to have the greatest benefit from any new international negotiation. In total, 52 percent of respondents ranked US workers first compared to just 26 percent that opted for the next highest first-choice ranking, US business. The dominant position of US workers in respondents' preferences over the gains from globalization could be interpreted as further evidence of a democratizing impulse across the US electorate. Yet the overall rankings are just as revealing. Scholars of the backlash have frequently pointed to an emergent 'America First' preference that has reestablished national boundaries as the key dividing lines in the structure of global governance (Churchwell 2018). The results presented here appear to confirm that preference, with a distribution that favors both domestic labor and capital against its foreign counterparts. Voters' understanding of the "citizens and communities" they seek to empower, in this case, may be circumscribed by national borders. Taken together with the evidence of a cooperation mandate, however, such a preference for domestic gains may not necessarily imply an associated rise in xenophobic attacks on foreign "citizens and communities." Rather, the proportion of voters who rank foreign actors as primary beneficiaries of international negotiations may suggest the need for

greater attention to the contest from below over the terms and conditions of international economic integration, rather than the assumption that voters simply oppose it outright.

To explore this intuition further, I coded the respondents into two different groups based on their responses to the above question about who should benefit from a new international agreement. The first group, which I call “Class First,” is composed of 582 respondents who ranked workers first — either US workers and then foreign workers, or vice versa. The second group, which I call “Nation First,” is composed of 476 respondents who ranked US groups first — either US workers and then US business owners, or vice versa. Finally, I coded a group of 91 that I call “Foreign-Oriented,” which seeks to benefit foreign groups above domestic ones — either ranking foreign workers and foreign businesses in their top two slots, or vice versa. Below, in Figure 7, I created a summary demographic chart in order to examine how each of these groups relates to key variables such as partisanship, race, income, education, age, and gender. As we might expect, the “Nation First” group is significantly older, less educated, and more Republican than their counterparts in the other groups, once again pointing to a potentially partisan-bred xenophobic motivation for the distribution of preferences above.

FIGURE 7: PROFILES OF DIFFERENT GROUPS BASED ON PREFERENCES OVER GAINS FROM GLOBALIZATION

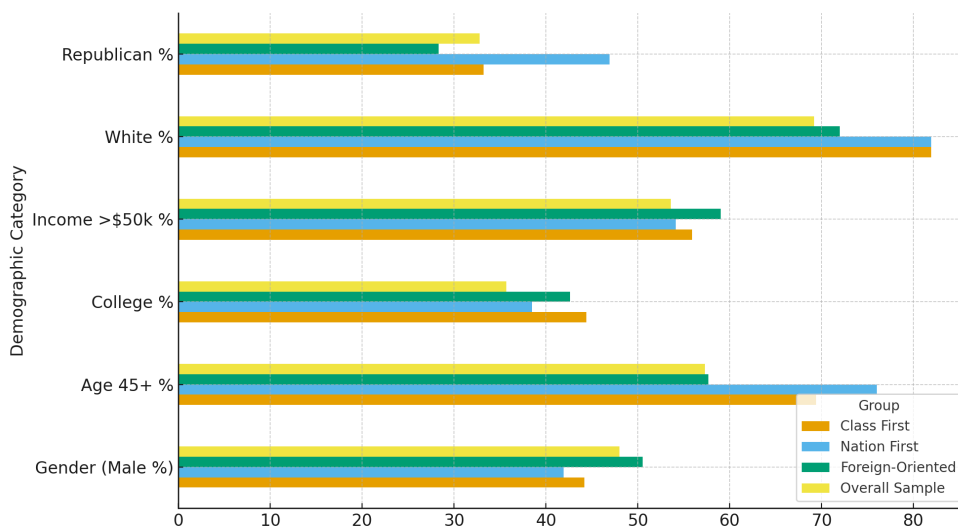


Figure 7 provides the demographic distribution for the three different ‘groups’ of respondents identified through the question on preferences over benefits from an international agreement.

Using these four groups, I then returned to the question of potential direction for the reform of the global governance system. Figure 8 below shows the proportion of each of these groups that prefers to give greater control over the system of globalization back to citizens and communities themselves. The descriptive findings complicate the picture set out in Figure 5 above, and the ‘America First’ interpretation that may be derived from it. Specifically, the disaggregated analysis suggests that class critique may undergird the preference for democratizing the system of globalization: those who believe that workers should benefit most from a new international agreement — irrespective of those workers nationality — are 18 percent more likely to prefer the devolution of power directly to citizens than those who take a nation-first approach. Voters may be increasingly discontent with the distribution of gains from globalization, yet these findings suggest that their opposition may derive from an internationalist — rather than a purely xenophobic — set of motivations.

FIGURE 8 PROPORTION OF EACH GROUP WHO BELIEVE “COMMUNITIES & CITIZENS” SHOULD BE GIVEN MORE CONTROL TO IMPROVE GLOBALIZATION

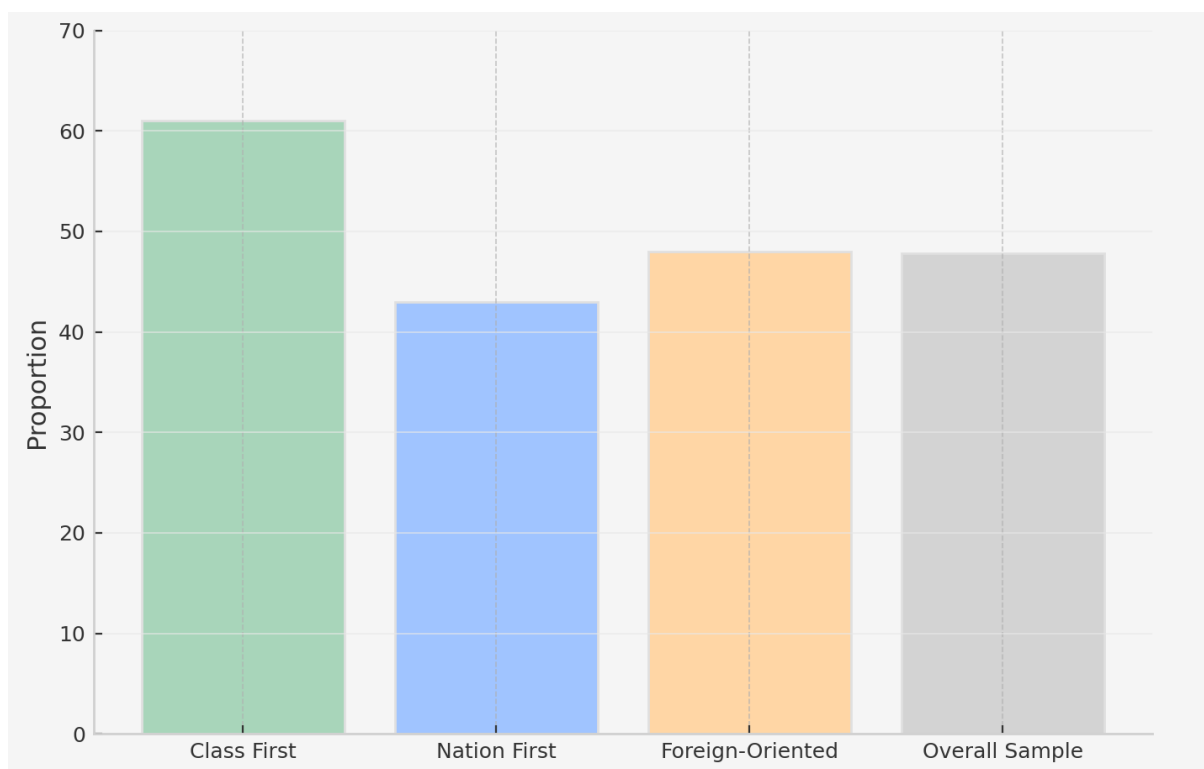


Figure 8 provides the weighted proportion of each group that answered the question on the reform of globalization by calling for greater control to be given to citizens and communities.

FINDINGS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

This section aims to complement the findings from the original US survey with additional findings from the United Kingdom. In July 2021, I conducted an original survey of 1,692 respondents across the United Kingdom with polling firm YouGov, attaching five additional questions to its annual UniOM survey focused on the system of globalization and voter attitudes, assessments, and preferences over its direction that closely mirrored the questions posed to US voters above. Across all questions, I find support for the expectations set out in this chapter, providing additional motivation to revisit and revise the globalization backlash thesis.

I begin with a question focused on UK voters' evaluation of the existing system of globalization. As in the United States, recent scholarship on the Brexit vote and the associated rise of both right-wing populism (as in the form of Nigel Farage's UKIP party) and left-wing populism (as in the case of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party) provide strong reasons to expect a high degree of discontent among UK voters (Ford and Goodwin 2017; Eatwell and Goodwin 2018). How well or badly do voters think the existing system of globalization addresses the global challenges that we face today? I present the descriptive findings from this question in Figure 9 below. As in the US survey, I find a distribution leaning heavily toward a negative assessment (Figure 3.10). Less than one percent of the entire sample assessed the current system to be working "Very well." Nearly fifty percent (49.14), by contrast, believe that the current system is working "Fairly badly" or "Very badly." The UK survey therefore appears to confirm the first expectation of this chapter on the extent and intensity of voter discontent with the institutions of global governance and their capacity to resolve the UK's most pressing issues.

FIGURE 9: PERFORMANCE OF GLOBALIZATION

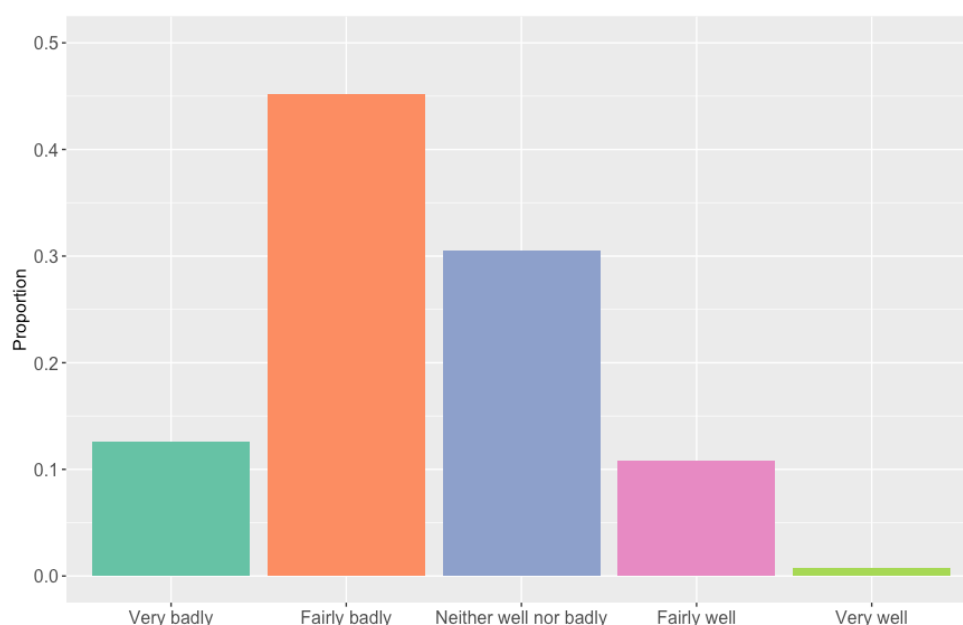


Figure 9 shows the weighted proportion of respondents in the United Kingdom by their answer to the question of how well or badly the system of globalization has performed.

Has this discontent translated into a preference for disintegration? Findings from the United Kingdom suggest that this component of the backlash thesis may not hold in the British context. Seeking to redress the methodological issues of the existing literature on the backlash, I provided respondents not with a binary question of more globalization or less globalization, but with a range of potential reforms to resolve the global challenges that the UK faces today. These included options to delegate global governance to (i) international organizations like the United Nations, (ii) multilateral agreements among nations, (iii) international non-profit organizations like Amnesty International, or (iv) multinational corporations like Microsoft — as well as a fifth option to disintegrate that system of global governance in order for the UK to go it alone (“Each country should manage its own approach”). Where theories of backlash might predict a large proportion of respondents to prefer this ‘sovereignist’ approach (Baldini et al. 2021), the findings in Figure 10 challenge the assumption of a mass preference for disintegration. While less than a fifth of respondents opted for the UK to manage its own approach, an overwhelming majority of respondents either called for a multilateral agreement between nations, or to delegate the management of global challenges to international organizations. Findings from the UK thus appear to confirm the second expectation of this

chapter, which suggests a broken mechanism linking voter discontent with anti-globalization attitudes.

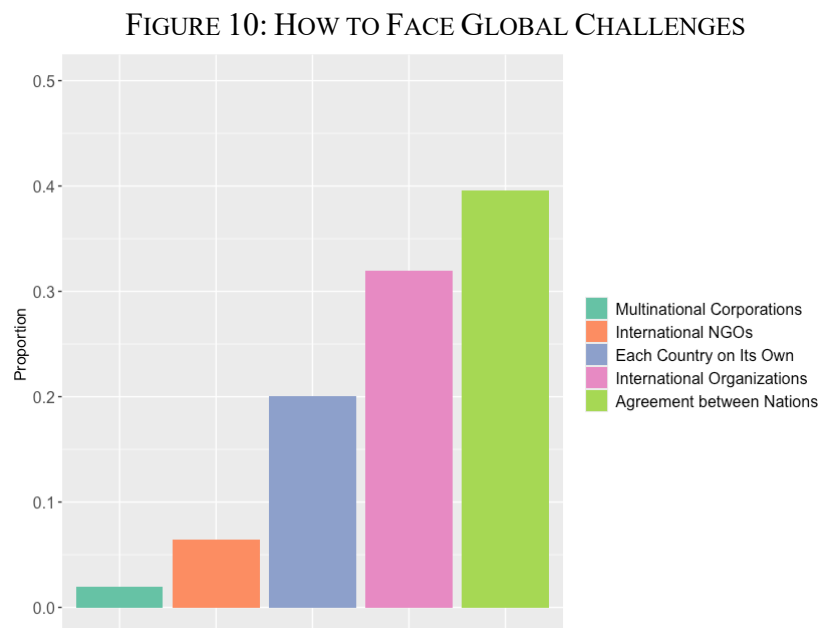


Figure 10 shows the weighted proportion of respondents by their answer to the question of how the UK government should face “global challenges.”

Building from this finding, I then turned to examine UK respondents’ underlying attitudes toward international engagement. As in the United States, I framed the question as one of political resources: Should the UK government should devote “more or less attention” to addressing global challenges? The findings are presented in Figure 11 below, coded on a five-point scale from “far less attention” to “far more attention.” The results are striking. Only a small proportion of respondents called for less attention to be paid by the UK government to issues of international coordination: just five percent believe it should devote “far less” attention, and just over seven percent who believe it should devote “slightly less” attention — less than half of the total percentage of respondents who believe the UK should devote “far more” attention instead. The findings from the UK thus provide additional support for the observation of a “cooperation mandate” in advanced democracies, as increasing attention is paid by citizens to crises of global governance in policy areas such as health and climate.

FIGURE 11: MORE OR LESS ATTENTION TO INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

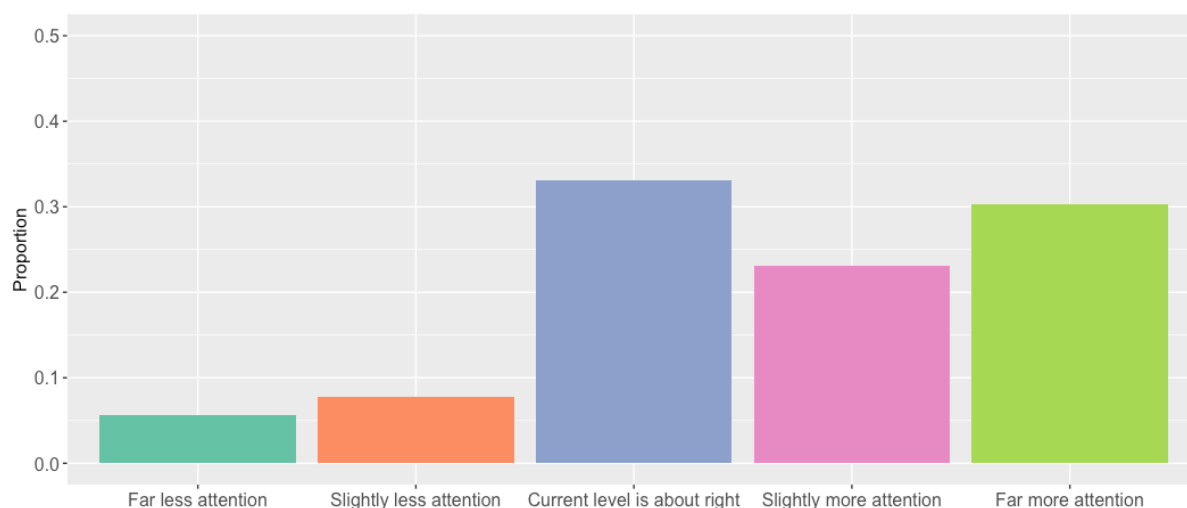


Figure 11 shows the weighted proportion of respondents by their answer to the question of whether the UK should pay more or less attention to working with other countries.

How, then, might UK voters seek to improve the structure of globalization, given their assessments of its poor performance? Many scholars have focused on the Brexit slogan “take back control” to suggest rising anti-globalization attitudes in Britain (Gamble 2021). The question remains, however, to where UK voters hope to take back control, if not — as in the case of the European Union — from whom. As in the case of the United States, I offered UK respondents a range of potential directions for global governance reform, and asked them which they believed would do most to improve the existing system of international cooperation: giving control to everyday citizens, national parliaments, trained experts, or civil society organizations — with the additional option for respondents to say that the existing system “does not need to be improved.” The findings are presented in Figure 12. Consistent with the fourth expectation — and the evidence from the US to support it — a small minority of voters (7.2 percent) believed that no improvement was needed to the existing system of globalization, while a large plurality (43.7 percent) believed that everyday citizens should exert greater control over its direction. Where many accounts have emphasized Brexit as a conflict over sovereignty, then — between a supra-national vision of the European Union and a sovereignist one (Heuser 2019) — these findings suggest that the popular critique of globalization goes beyond a mere preference for stronger national powers (22 percent) to push for a true devolution of authority to citizens themselves.

FIGURE 12: HOW TO REFORM GLOBALIZATION

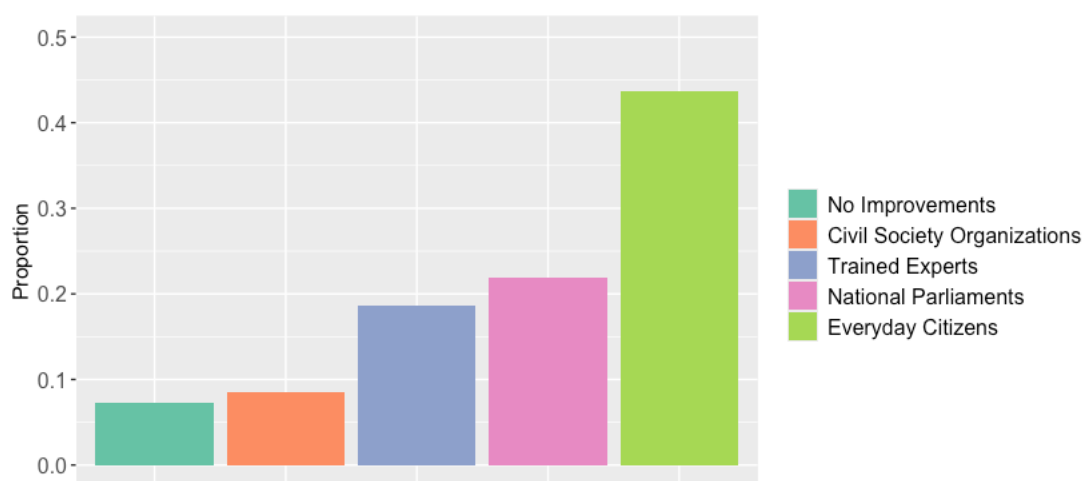


Figure 12 shows the weighted proportion of respondents by their answer to the question of which reform would do “most” to improve the existing system of globalization.

MECHANISMS

Previous sections provided a descriptive portrait of popular attitudes toward globalization, both challenging and clarifying the existing account of a growing globalization “backlash” across advanced democracies like the United States and United Kingdom. Together, the descriptive findings from these two original surveys suggest wide variation of public opinion across policy areas, dimensions of globalization, and direction for its reform. What might explain this variation? What are the relationships that we might find in the original data sourced for this chapter to help explain the evolving attitudes that voters hold to issues such as international trade or global health? And what might those relationships tell us about the future of global governance at a time of geopolitical turbulence?

These questions hold important implications for our study of the new politics of globalization. While the proportion of voters with a preference for disintegration may be much smaller than conventional wisdom suggests, the existence of a backlash constituency — however small — may open the door to political entrepreneurs who seek to weaponize this discontent (De Vries, Hobolt, and Walter 2021), leading to attacks on the international order about which Tony Blair (2016) recently warned. This investigation as such not only aims to shed light on the potential

drivers of anti-globalization sentiment, but also the potential sources for its enduring support, as highlighted by the evidence of a “cooperation mandate” set out in the sections above.

To explore these mechanisms, I return to the original surveys from the United States and the United Kingdom. Making use of a rich set of demographic data that I collected in the surveys, I use standard OLS methods to move past the descriptive portrait traced in the previous sections to test the relationship between key variables and voter attitudes across the three areas of *institutions*, *engagement*, and *direction* of reform to the global governance system. I focus this analysis on three mechanisms, in particular: (i) partisan affiliation, reflecting the supply-side influence of political parties on the formation of demand-side preferences; (ii) personal experience, as influenced both by the effects of generational cohort and the actual events that each has lived in the real world; and (iii) class solidarity, or the ways in which position in relation to labor and capital may play a role in mediating voter preferences over the structure of globalization.

The first variable of interest is partisanship. In review of the backlash literature, Walter (2021) has traced a steady rise of globalization-skeptic parties across advanced democracies. In the United States, for example, such a supply-side dynamic has led to the re-election of the world’s primary champion of international disintegration at the helm of the US Republic Party (see, e.g. Bentley and Lerner 2022). In the United Kingdom, meanwhile, the architect of the country’s exit from the European Union, Nigel Farage, heads the party leading its national polls. In that context, I aim to explore the role that partisanship plays in the formation of voter attitudes in key countries like the United States and in the United Kingdom — not only over the general valence of globalization, but also toward specific institutions like the World Health Organization or the USMCA that have become objects and instruments of partisan warfare at the national level.

The second variable of interest is personal experience. Partisan signals may swing voter opinions on priority issues for national parties, but those parties compete across heterogeneous electoral terrain, pursuing voters of different ages, occupations, and geographies. Consider the role of age. Younger voters are set to endure the worst consequences of a changing climate; as such, we might expect that their views of environmental cooperation are informed by their expectations of its impact on their personal lives. Older voters, meanwhile, suffer the most immediate consequences of pandemics such as Covid-19 that endanger their health; we might

expect their preferences to reflect the urgency of health cooperation — even in cases where their political party leaders do not. Similarly, the impact of globalization has been highly uneven across economies like the US and the UK (Autor, Dorn, and Hansen 2021; Ballard-Rosa et al. 2021). Regardless of partisan signals, then, we might expect people’s personal assessments of globalization’s impact on their lives to inform their preferences over its future direction.

Finally, class solidarities may play a key role in linking local experience to globalization preferences. In the descriptive sections above, I used the original survey data from the United States to illustrate the diversity of views on who should benefit from trade negotiations, which — even in a country famous for its ‘America First’ politics — often cut across national boundaries to account for the gains to foreign workers and businesses alike. We might expect the question of class, therefore — and the perception of who benefits from the system of globalization as it is presently constructed — to inform how voters develop preferences over its future.

In the following section, I use the data from both the US and UK surveys to examine these mechanisms. The results are far from conclusive, and further research will be necessary to develop a more sophisticated account of how voter preferences form, evolve, and apply to electoral outcomes that shape the trajectory of globalization. Nonetheless, the regression analysis developed below may help to set a direction for that research by highlighting the key pathways through which preferences both disintegration and reintegration are forming today.

ANALYSIS

The following analysis is divided into three parts, each of which corresponds to the three primary mechanisms that I aim to explore in this section. I have added full regression tables throughout the below analysis in order to account for the section's main findings, and I have published additional information regarding the survey data in the appendix at the end of the chapter.

PARTISANSHIP

I begin by looking at the relationship between partisanship and preferences over globalization with an extensive table of OLS regression results below. For each of the five dependent variables in table, I measure both the relationship with Republican partisanship alone and with six key controls that are relevant for the present investigation: race, age, education, location, income, and gender.

The first two sets of models make use of an *assessment* variable in the US survey. The assessment variable asked respondents to assess how well the current system of globalization is working for various groups and constituencies, on a five-point scale from very poorly to very well. In the first two models ('Party'), I measure the relationship between Republican partisanship and respondents' assessment of globalization's performance for Republicans as a group. In the second set of models ('USA'), I measure the relationship between Republican partisanship and respondents' assessments of globalization performance for the country overall.

The results are striking. Compared to the other respondents in the survey, Republicans believe that globalization has worked well for supporters of their party — but poorly for the nation overall. The strength of these opposing coefficients presents a kind of empirical puzzle: How is it that respondents who claim to have gained from a system sustain such a negative assessment of that system's performance overall? If Republicans do not believe that the overall system of globalization is biased against their party interests, then what can account for their

pessimistic assessment of its overall effects for the nation? The answer may lie in the strength of the supply-side signals that emanate toward the party's base.

Since the arrival of Donald Trump, the Republican party has positioned itself as a stalwart opponent of the multilateral system under the banner of 'America First'. But this slogan applies unequally to different policy arenas. Whereas Trump boasted the USMCA agreement on North American trade as the "most important ever" written, for example, Trump's administration has simultaneously engaged in aggressive climate-denial, withdrawing from the country's Paris commitments to the UNFCCC (Stavins 2017). These differences can provide a degree of causal leverage to explore the role of ideology in the formation of anti-globalization attitudes.

In Table 1, I explore the role of partisanship in respondents' preferences over the direction of international institutional reform. Specifically, I created a variable *disintegration*, coding respondents with a "1" if they preferred to abandon international organizations such as the United Nations, World Health Organization, and USMCA. The overall finding is unsurprising: Republicans are significantly more likely to prefer disengagement from these international institutions than other respondents in the US sample. Yet the difference in the effect sizes between the models is just as interesting: USMCA, championed by Republican President Donald Trump, is the least likely to earn the ire of Republican voters, while the WHO — which came under fire from the Republican party for its supposed mismanagement of the Covid-19 pandemic — displays the strongest.

We can find similar evidence in the analysis of respondents' preferences over international engagement on the three key issues explored in the US survey: the economy (Table 3), the environment (Table 4), and health (Table 5). In Tables 3, 4, and 5 — published at the end of this analysis section — I examine the relationship between Republican partisanship and support for international engagement on each of these issues respectively, where engagement is measured on a 5-point scale from "Far less attention" to "Far more attention." Across three tables, we see a strong and highly significant negative relationship between Republican partisanship and support for international engagement on these key issues. By far the strongest effect of Republican affiliation, however, is on attitudes toward environmental issues, which likely reflects the party's longstanding opposition to collective action to address climate change.

TABLE 1: REPUBLICAN PARTISANSHIP AND PREFERENCES OVER GLOBALIZATION

	Party	Party	USA	USA	UN	UN	WHO	WHO	USMCA	USMCA
Republican	0.290*** (0.079)	0.277*** (0.081)	-0.548*** (0.076)	-0.509*** (0.079)	0.087*** (0.017)	0.085*** (0.018)	0.121*** (0.018)	0.120*** (0.019)	0.063*** (0.017)	0.062*** (0.018)
Race		0.363*** (0.092)		0.029 (0.090)		-0.024 (0.020)		-0.007 (0.022)		0.025 (0.021)
Age		-0.553*** (0.083)		-0.318*** (0.081)		0.013 (0.018)		-0.002 (0.019)		0.009 (0.018)
College		0.113 (0.083)		0.004 (0.080)		0.003 (0.018)		0.004 (0.019)		0.011 (0.018)
Urban		-0.010 (0.083)		0.091 (0.081)		-0.043** (0.018)		-0.027 (0.020)		0.016 (0.019)
Income		0.047 (0.080)		-0.010 (0.077)		-0.016 (0.017)		-0.009 (0.018)		-0.014 (0.017)
Gender		-0.101 (0.078)		0.046 (0.076)		0.062*** (0.017)		0.024 (0.018)		0.022 (0.017)
Constant	2.710*** (0.047)	2.789*** (0.109)	3.184*** (0.045)	3.320*** (0.105)	0.064*** (0.010)	0.073*** (0.024)	0.066*** (0.011)	0.076*** (0.025)	0.073*** (0.010)	0.039 (0.024)
<i>N</i>	1071	1063	1136	1128	1278	1269	1278	1269	1278	1269
R-squared	0.012	0.057	0.044	0.055	0.019	0.030	0.034	0.033	0.010	0.010

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

In Figure 13, I visualize the partisan differences in attitudes toward international engagement. And in Figure 14, I compare the partisan mechanism to the others that I identify in this section. The overall finding is clear: Republican affiliation is just significant across all models in Tables 3, 4, and 5; it is by far the strongest predictor of negative attitudes toward international engagement in the United States. Conversely, as Figure 13 shows, Democratic Party partisanship predicts a stronger positive preference for international integration as compared both to Republicans and Independent voters, reflecting an equally longstanding leadership of the integration agenda at the federal level.

FIGURE 13 INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT BY PARTISANSHIP IN UNITED STATES

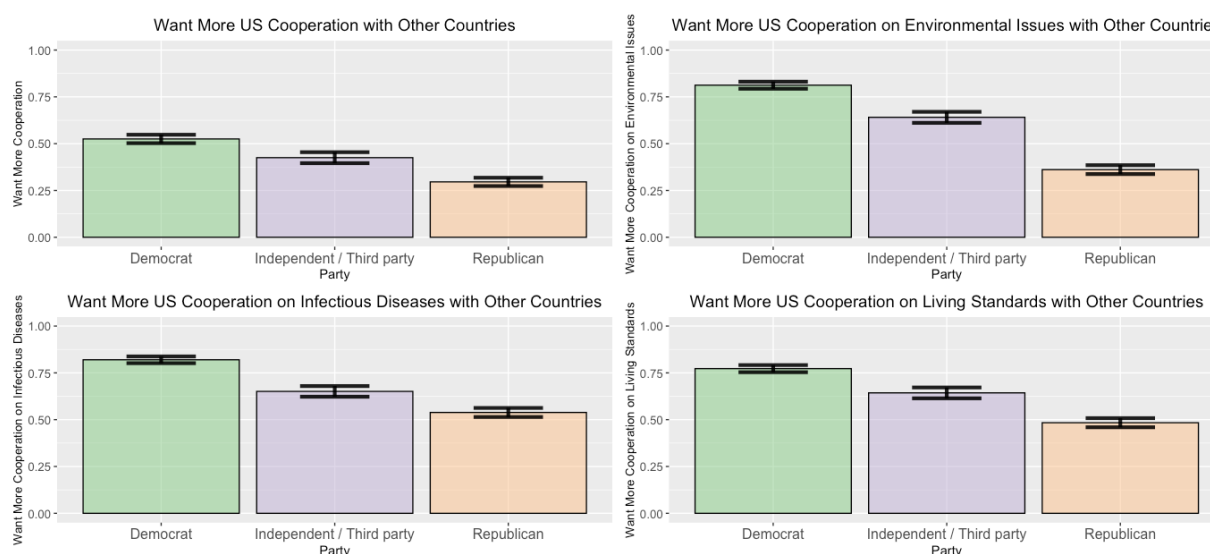


Figure 13 displays the relationship between party partisanship and support for US engagement with other countries both generally and on specific issue areas.

What about in the United Kingdom? If Donald J. Trump is well known both domestically and internationally for his ‘anti-globalization’ approach, what about the Conservative Party that led the UK’s exit from the European Union? In Table 2, I bring the data from the UK original survey to bear on the question of partisan affiliation’s relationship to globalization preferences. Specifically,

I use standard OLS to measure the relationship between Conservative Party identification and preferences over whether the UK government should devote more or less attention to international engagement, as measured on a five-point scale from “Far less attention” to “Far more attention.” I then regress Conservative Party identification on the attention variable both with and without key control variables such as income, race, gender, education, and region. The results are consistent with the US finding: Conservative Party membership is highly and negatively correlated with support for the UK government’s attention to international engagement.

The Conservative Party, however, was not always the party of Brexit — or isolationism more broadly. Indeed, many advocates of Britain’s departure from the European Union suggested that it might create the opportunity for a different kind of integration into the international community — away from the supranational governance of the EU and toward a more harmonious balance between sovereign nation-states. To test that argument, I added a Brexit variable into Table 2 and examined its relationship to international engagement. The findings are almost as strong as those of the Conservative Party to which the cause of Brexit was once closely affiliated: UK voters for Brexit are approximately 20 percent less supportive of international engagement than their non-Brexit voting counterparts.

TABLE 2: UK PARTISANSHIP, BREXIT, AND ATTENTION TO INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Conservative	-0.9931*** (0.0586)		-0.9381*** (0.0738)	
Brexit		-0.7923*** (0.0554)		-0.7728*** (0.0729)
Income			0.0033 (0.0103)	-0.0100 (0.0098)
Race			0.1055 (0.1758)	0.3171** (0.1498)
Gender			-0.0354 (0.0720)	0.0096 (0.0684)
Education			0.0226*** (0.0084)	0.0202** (0.0079)
London			0.0919 (0.1135)	0.1894* (0.1087)
Constant	4.1308*** (0.0403)	3.9631*** (0.0357)	3.7127*** (0.2143)	3.4774*** (0.1923)
N	1231	1571	784	979
R-squared	0.189	0.115	0.205	0.136

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

EXPERIENCE

Voters, however, are not fools (Key 1966). While many party militants may be guided by the signals of their elected leaders, other considerations are also central to the formation of attitudes about the institutions that play a key role in determining their quality of life. Below, in Tables 3-5, I explore this mechanism of personal experience by returning to the determinants of voter preferences over international engagement on the key policy issues of the economy, the environment, and health, measuring the relationship to the five-point measurement of US engagement on these issues, from “Far less attention” to “Far more attention.”

In Model 4 of each table, for example, I explore the role that age plays in structuring those preferences. By September 2021, the Covid-19 virus had been spreading for over 18 months, risking the lives of older citizens most vulnerable to the lethal consequences of the virus. While the dominant narrative of the globalization backlash suggests that young people demand stronger support for international coordination across all policy areas — because they grew up in a globalized, multicultural, and rapidly heating world (Kriesi et al. 2008) — Table 5 suggests the opposite effect, with older respondents calling loudest to strengthen international engagement to fight infectious disease. The strong and significant relationship between age and support for health cooperation thus suggests that people form preferences over globalization both through affective *and* programmatic channels. In other words, globalization may not too complex (Dahl 1999) nor too distant (Berger 2000) for voters to develop informed attitudes; there may be a direct transmission from global events to voter preferences through lived experience and the material interests they imply.

Further evidence for the mechanism of lived experience can be found in the relationship between respondents’ assessments of globalization’s impact on their personal lives and their support for international coordination across all three policy areas. Figure 11 (Tables 3-5) show the results of models that regress this assessment — ranked on a 5-point scale from “Very poorly” to “Very well” — on attitudes toward international engagement across the three main policy areas in this chapter. Each shows large and significant positive effects of a positive personal assessment on support for stronger engagement. As in the case of age, this mechanism may be explained as a

direct effect, with respondents forming preferences over globalization on the basis of their individual well-being, suggesting that the political legitimacy of the integration process may hinge in large part on its ability to deliver for its constituents.

Assessments of personal gain, however, may not always yield support for stronger forms of globalization. The data from the United States demonstrate a strong correlation between the survey’s measure of income and respondent’s personal assessment of globalization. However, when measured against support for international engagement to “raise living standards”, higher income predicts a large and significant *decrease* in support, possibly because higher income respondents perceive such international schemes as a redistributive project that threatens their personal interests, such as in Rodrik’s (1998) seminal observation that open economies also tend to have “bigger governments” with larger social spending budgets. This observation thus suggests a third mechanism linking voter preferences to global governance outcomes through class position.

FIGURE 14. MAPPING THE MECHANISMS

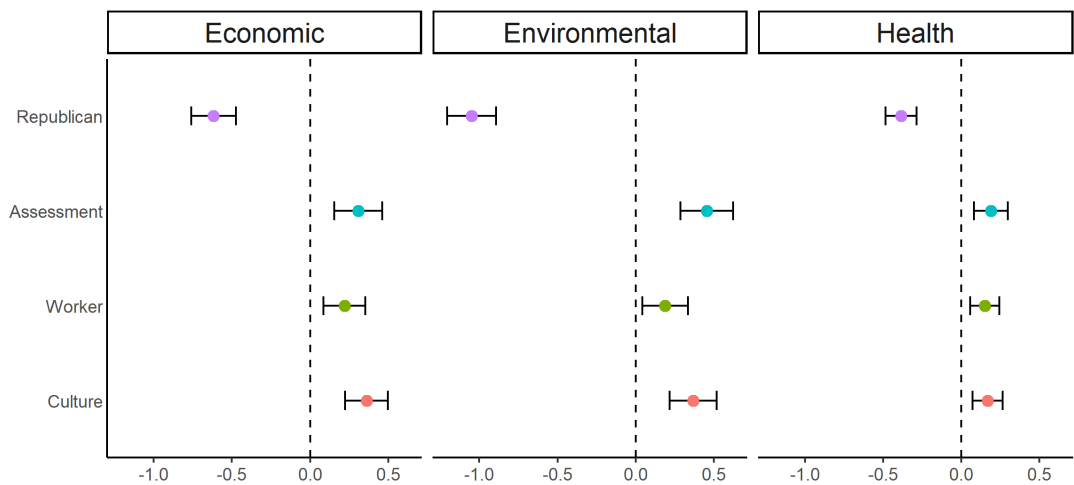


Figure 14 displays the relationship between each of the key variables and support for greater US engagement with other countries on each of the three issues.

CLASS

What then about the role of class solidarity in structuring respondents' preferences over globalization? So far, we have identified the role that partisan loyalty and individual interests play in guiding support or opposition to the US governments' engagement with other countries. Yet the consequences of international integration reach far beyond national borders; both for its opponents as for its advocates, globalization is understood as a distributive process that delivers gains and enforces losses between countries as much as within them. NAFTA was once feared, in the words of Ross Perot, as a 'great sucking sound' that would send the fruits of US prosperity south to Mexico (Thornbecke and Eigen-Zucchi 2002); USMCA, by contrast, was celebrated by President Donald Trump as the mechanism through which the United States would recover them.

To explore this mechanism in greater detail, I return to respondents' views of a hypothetical scenario in which "several countries, including the United States, are negotiating a new international agreement." As explained above, respondents were asked in this question to rank who should benefit most from the agreement by four groups: (i) workers in the United States, (ii) workers in foreign countries, (iii) business owners in the United States, and (iv) business owners in foreign countries. For the purposes of this regression analysis, I then created a new variable based on respondents' top ranking, *Worker*, coded as 1 for respondents that ranked workers highest on either side of the border, and 0 for those that did not. The results are clear — and somewhat counterintuitive: while much of the public discourse on the globalization backlash points to popular anger among the economically dispossessed, it is respondents who identify with workers who express the strongest enthusiasm for cross-border collaboration on the key issues of our time.

Globalization preferences thus appear to express a clear class dimension, helping to resolve one of the major debates in the political economy literature over the past decade. As set out in the review above, the debate over globalization backlash has largely divided between those who see it as an economic phenomenon or those who it as a cultural one. The latter account argues that concerns about rapid cultural change are driving disintegration (e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2019): voters who care most about who shapes culture, according to this account, are the ones most keen on containment from the international community. The findings of this survey, however, suggest the

opposite. I asked respondents to rate how important culture is to their assessment of the current system of globalization — specifically “who shapes culture and the spread of ideas” — on a 5-point scale that ranged from very important, to not at all important. I then regressed this variable on the indicators of international coordination (Tables 3-5) and mapped them again in Figure 11. Contrary to the cultural backlash account, I find that increasing the importance of culture has a strong, consistent, and significant *positive* effect on respondents’ preferences for stronger forms of international coordination. In other words, I find no evidence of a cultural ‘backlash’ against globalization; rather, read in reverse, it is respondents who care least about the sources of its production who are most likely to lash out against the institutions of international integration.

The core finding of this study may be that the globalization backlash is broadly overstated. Nonetheless, this analysis of actually existing backlash preferences lends further support to the economic account of globalization preferences over those of cultural concern. It is higher income respondents, the data suggest, who are mounting the strongest opposition to renewed forms of international engagement — even if they are the ones who have benefitted most from prior decades of economic integration — while it is those who seek to redistribute those gains who are standing up tallest against new forms of isolationism in the United States.

TABLE 3: SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT ON THE ECONOMY

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Republican	-0.618*** (0.073)				-0.543*** (0.079)
Assessment		0.216*** (0.034)			0.153*** (0.033)
Worker			0.391*** (0.113)		0.227* (0.121)
Culture				0.239*** (0.036)	0.200*** (0.039)
Age	0.086 (0.075)	0.140* (0.083)	0.047 (0.077)	0.104 (0.076)	0.164** (0.080)
Income	-0.202*** (0.071)	-0.281*** (0.079)	-0.239*** (0.072)	-0.232*** (0.071)	-0.218*** (0.076)
Race	0.173** (0.084)	0.067 (0.090)	0.024 (0.084)	0.062 (0.083)	0.196** (0.088)
Education	0.176** (0.074)	0.226*** (0.082)	0.227*** (0.075)	0.212*** (0.074)	0.194** (0.079)
Urban	0.180** (0.076)	0.218*** (0.082)	0.276*** (0.077)	0.231*** (0.076)	0.158** (0.080)
Gender	0.064 (0.071)	0.023 (0.078)	0.068 (0.073)	0.057 (0.071)	0.060 (0.075)
Constant	3.736*** (0.097)	2.929*** (0.149)	3.279*** (0.140)	2.910*** (0.145)	2.406*** (0.202)
N	1214	1046	1214	1214	1046
R-squared	0.078	0.060	0.033	0.058	0.133

Standard errors in parentheses.

* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

TABLE 4. SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Republican	-1.051*** (0.080)				-0.870*** (0.083)
Assessment		0.389*** (0.037)			0.302*** (0.035)
Worker			0.477*** (0.128)		0.298** (0.127)
Culture				0.296*** (0.041)	0.188*** (0.041)
Age	0.021 (0.082)	0.102 (0.090)	-0.047 (0.087)	0.030 (0.086)	0.131 (0.085)
Income	-0.069 (0.078)	-0.233*** (0.086)	-0.131 (0.082)	-0.121 (0.081)	-0.139* (0.081)
Race	0.171* (0.092)	-0.038 (0.097)	-0.077 (0.096)	-0.032 (0.094)	0.167* (0.093)
Education	0.121 (0.081)	0.184** (0.089)	0.208** (0.086)	0.192** (0.085)	0.127 (0.083)
Urban	0.158* (0.083)	0.169* (0.089)	0.306*** (0.088)	0.254*** (0.087)	0.081 (0.084)
Gender	-0.080 (0.078)	-0.156* (0.084)	-0.083 (0.083)	-0.100 (0.081)	-0.107 (0.079)
Constant	3.828*** (0.107)	2.492*** (0.161)	3.221*** (0.159)	2.749*** (0.165)	2.064*** (0.212)
N	1231	1054	1231	1231	1054
R-squared	0.140	0.112	0.029	0.059	0.223

Standard errors in parentheses.

* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

TABLE 5. SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT ON HEALTH

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Republican	-0.385*** (0.051)				-0.304*** (0.055)
Assessment		0.212*** (0.023)			0.179*** (0.023)
Worker			0.335*** (0.077)		0.264*** (0.084)
Culture				0.109*** (0.025)	0.065** (0.027)
Age	0.249*** (0.052)	0.307*** (0.057)	0.214*** (0.053)	0.254*** (0.053)	0.305*** (0.056)
Income	-0.019 (0.049)	-0.129** (0.054)	-0.042 (0.050)	-0.039 (0.050)	-0.095* (0.053)
Race	0.168*** (0.058)	0.093 (0.062)	0.075 (0.058)	0.093 (0.058)	0.160*** (0.062)
Education	0.015 (0.051)	0.023 (0.056)	0.051 (0.052)	0.042 (0.052)	0.006 (0.055)
Urban	0.012 (0.053)	0.015 (0.056)	0.075 (0.053)	0.047 (0.053)	-0.009 (0.056)
Gender	-0.006 (0.049)	-0.002 (0.053)	-0.000 (0.050)	-0.012 (0.050)	0.022 (0.052)
Constant	3.347*** (0.068)	2.640*** (0.102)	2.985*** (0.096)	2.951*** (0.101)	2.363*** (0.140)
N	1229	1054	1229	1229	1054
R-squared	0.066	0.093	0.037	0.037	0.136

Standard errors in parentheses.

* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01

DISCUSSION

This article revisits the thesis of the “globalization backlash” with original data collected from survey respondents in the United States and the United Kingdom. Through an extensive survey of attitudes toward globalization, assessments of globalization, and prescriptions for globalization, I aimed to provide greater context for and texture of mass preferences as a challenge to the backlash literature that relies on binary variables such as referenda, run-off elections, and more-or-less trade preferences. In this way, the paper set out to test whether globalization is indeed “under attack”, and if not, how public opinion varies across the electorate in time, geography, and demography.

The findings present a challenge to the underlying assumptions of the backlash thesis. Against the conventional wisdom that a large and increasing proportion of voters are “anti-globalization,” survey findings suggest high levels of support for international cooperation on key issues like health, living standards, and environmental protection. A significant proportion of voters may report increasing discontent with international organizations such as the United Nations or the World Health Organization. But these negative attitudes do not support the disintegrative assumption of the backlash thesis: even critical voters frequently prefer reform or refoundation of existing international organizations over abandoning their stated mission.

The backlash literature often overlooks the role that programmatic preferences play in the development and expression of citizens’ demands on globalization and its institutions. The findings of this paper suggest that even in a country like the United States—the focus of the vast majority of backlash studies—voters cannot be divided between neat pro- and anti-globalization positions. On the contrary, by documenting both the broad commitment to multilateralism and the diverse criticisms of its configuration, these survey data suggest that mass preferences in the United States and the United Kingdom are somewhere in the middle: they call not to ditch the system of globalization, but rather to reform, reshape, and reimagine its institutions to be more democratic and its gains more equally distributed (Held and McGrew 2003).

Those preferences are not unstructured. On the contrary, the analysis presented in this chapter suggests strong divisions across the US and UK electorates based on issues such as partisanship, pocketbooks, and class solidarities. Far from a mere culture war (Norris and Inglehart 2016) over

values and identities, the original data that I gathered for this chapter show how a mix of supply-side signals from political parties and demand-side assessments of globalization's performance shape voters' preferences over whether their governments should engage their neighbors on key issues such as climate change and global health — and on what terms.

The question remains, then, how these preferences are processed by political systems both inside the US and across the countries caught in the crosshairs of the globalization backlash. Future research might thus focus from the demand-side story told in this paper to the supply-side one, examining how mass preferences travel from voters' minds into the engines of party-political organization. If voters alone cannot be blamed for the rise of anti-globalization politics, then future research should examine under which conditions political entrepreneurs succeed to push this politics against the preferences of their electorate, and under which conditions that electorate pushes back.

3.

THE CARTEL NGO

INTRODUCTION

Who represents ordinary people's globalization preferences? The role of representation traditionally belongs to political parties. According to this classical view, political parties compete to provide a program that corresponds most comprehensively to the median preferences of the voting population (Downs 1957). In theory, that coverage of preferences should extend across all issue areas, from social policies like marriage equality to economic policies like welfare benefits to foreign policies like trade agreements. Recent research suggests, however, that preference representation is asymmetrical across these issue areas — skewed, in particular, away from ordinary people's preferences over their governments' foreign engagements. In the United States, for example, studies have shown that foreign policy corresponds least to ordinary peoples' preferences, and most to the interests of high-income voters, interest groups, and experts working in think tanks and research organizations (Gilens 2012; Broockman and Malhotra 2020; Grossman et al. 2021).

The previous chapter presented further evidence of a democratic deficit in the representation of voters' globalization preferences. Recent years have seen a major shift toward anti-globalization positions by 'populist' parties across advanced democracies (Walter 2021). From this observation, many commentators have assumed that a similar 'backlash' is underway across the electorate, proposing a demand-driven explanation for recent challenges to the institutions of the international order. The original survey data presented in the previous chapter, however, suggests that the

dramatic party shifts toward anti-globalization positions do not necessarily represent the underlying preferences of their voters. On the contrary, an overwhelming majority of voters in the United States called for stronger forms of international engagement on key issues such as the environment, infectious disease, and living standards.

The causes of the mass public's "comparatively muted influence" (Jacobs and Page 2005, 121) on foreign policy may be varied: absence of information, concentration of special interests, constrained agency of governments operating in an integrated system of globalization. Scholars have long warned that the influence of public opinion would create a "morbid derangement of the true functions of power" in the global system (Lippman 1955, 15). Regardless of such normative concerns about citizens and their "cognitive and emotional obstacles" (Dahl 1999, 26) to making sense of globalization, the political consequences of their exclusion is clear: the blockage of the international pathway of global politics that should in theory connect citizens, governments, and international institutions in the multilateral system (Table 6).

TABLE 6: THE TWO PATHWAYS OF MASS POLITICS

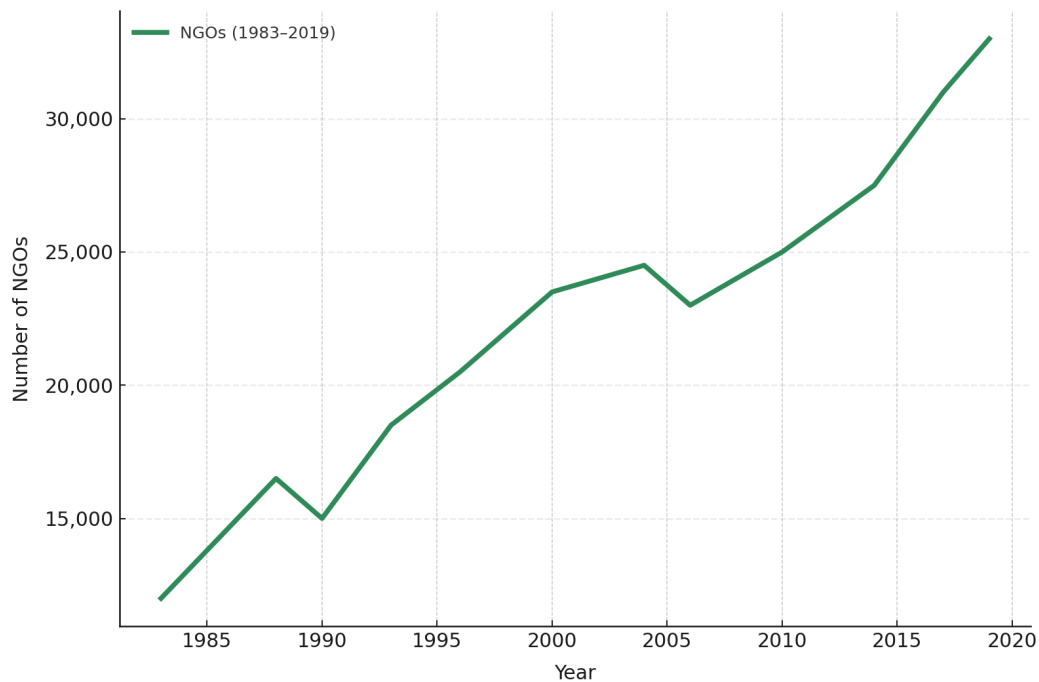
Pathway	Micro-Level Unit	Meso-Level Institutions	Macro-Level Arena
International	Citizens	Parties, Governments, Intergovernmental Organizations	Multilateral System
Transnational	Stakeholders	Social Movements, Advocacy Networks, NGOs	Global Civil Society

In place of the international pathway of mass politics, scholars have observed the emergence of a transnational pathway to represent ordinary people's globalization preferences. Since the early 1990s, these studies have documented the formation of new social movements (Della Port and Diani 2015), transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1999; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink 2002; Carpenter 2007), and international non-governmental organizations (Clark 2001; Cooley and Ron 2002; Busby 2010) that operate in a new arena known as 'global civil society' (Kaldor 2003) — the "new superpower," UN General Secretary Kofi Annan said in 1998: "the true guardians of democracy and good governance everywhere."

Given the representative failures of traditional parties in foreign policy, global civil society has been described as a democratic antidote to the pressures of globalization. It is the primary 'site of struggle' in the age of globalization (Walzer 1995) — a response to the technological innovations of the late twentieth century (Castells 2008), an arena to defend of human rights in the age of global citizenship (Kaldor 2003), and a vehicle to "persuade, pressurize, and gain leverage over much more powerful organizations" (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 89).

To document the increasing activation of the transnational pathway of mass politics, scholars point to two related trends. The first is the explosive rise of NGOs over the course of the past three decades, swelling from 15,000 to nearly 35,000 between 1989 and 2019 — even as the number of international government organizations has stagnated (Figure 1). The second is the 'opening up' of international organizations over the same period toward stronger forms of engagement with these non-state actors — a "mechanism of democratization" that "establishes complementary channels of citizen representation" (Tallberg et al. 2013, 19).

FIGURE 15: NUMBER OF NGOS (1983-2019)



Yet while the pattern of linear growth presents an image of continuity, this period has seen a fundamental transformation in the shape, function, and performance of NGOs in the arena of global civil society. The total number of NGOs may continue to rise, but their developmental trajectories vary widely (Stephen and Zürn 2019). While some of them have remained small and regional, others have grown into massive global operations: between 1998 and 2016, for example, Greenpeace’s budget grew over 300% to €338 million, with scores of regional offices set up around the world under the umbrella of Greenpeace International (Eden 2004). The source of this funding has shifted along with the structure of the economies in which they are headquartered: new private philanthropies, like the Open Society Foundation, now dominate the distribution of resources through the veins of global civil society (Clarke 2019). And the scope of NGOs work has changed as well, as many come to take on critical functions in global governance far beyond mere “persuasion” and “pressure” (Kick and Sikkink 1999): during the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation assumed a central role in the coordination of vaccine production and distribution around the world. In short, both the internal and external

dynamics of NGOs have undergone rapid transformation over the past three decades, at variable rates and in disparate directions (Hadden 2015).

Taken together, these changes have shaped a very different landscape of global civil society than the one that emerged in the 1990s. Recent scholarship by Sarah Dunn Bush and Jennifer Hadden (2019) renders that new landscape. Against the ‘commonplace’ observation that the number of NGOs has risen over the past three decades, Bush and Hadden document the decline of this growth rate as NGO populations have become increasingly dense — even as the revenues of the NGO sector have continued to expand. If international organizations are increasingly open to NGO participation — and if citizens are increasingly reliant on NGO participation as a mechanism of democratization — then “the decline and stagnation in growth rate is puzzling from the perspective of existing theory, necessitating new thinking” (Bush and Hadden 2019, 1133).

This chapter sets out to address this puzzle by examining the evolving role of NGOs in the new politics of globalization. To do so, I apply a theoretical framework first developed in the study of the evolution of party systems over the course of the twentieth century (Kirchheimer 1966; Katz and Mair 1995, 2009; Blyth and Katz 2005). According to this framework, the form and function of political parties transformed alongside the development of democratic systems: ‘cadre’ parties with on restricted modes of membership responded to the expansion of the franchise by becoming ‘mass’ parties; once institutionalized in these systems of universal suffrage, ‘mass’ parties became ‘catch-all’ parties that served as brokers between citizens and the state. Each of these ideal types marked a different relationship between parties and the civil society they purposed to represent. Recent years, however, have seen the emergence of a new type of party — the ‘cartel’ party — that has severed its ties with civil society; the cartel party no longer competes to represent the preferences of the voting population, but rather seeks only to ensure its survival through programmatic convergence with its opponents, running “campaigns [that] are now almost exclusively capital-intensive, professional, and centralized” (Katz and Mair 1995, 20).

In this chapter, I adapt this theoretical framework to the study of NGOs in the global governance system. Early theories of transnational politics focused on the emergence of ‘cadre’ NGOs founded as grassroots organizations by issue-oriented militants to advocate change in government policy

and global governance more broadly (Pleyers 2010). As the so-called ‘Third Wave of Globalization’ advanced through the late 20th century, however, these cadre NGOs developed into mass ones: large and homogeneous membership focused on labor-intensive tactics of mass mobilization, but still focused on a single issue — such as the environment — that appealed to the mass public as a ‘global’ cause. As NGOs multiplied and diversified into the 21st century, these mass NGOs morphed into catch-all NGOs, led by trained activists and dedicated to “ensuring the participation of world society in global decision-making and implementation” (Zürn 2018). Unlike the grassroots cadre NGO, the catch-all NGO acts a broker — or a ‘transmission belt’ (Steffeck and Nanz 2008: 8) — between global civil society, the state, and international organizations directly. These organizations are not only catch-all in the nature of their membership; through a process that Jen Iris Allan calls “forum multiplying” (2021: 6), they are catch-all in the range of issues on which they claim expertise: ‘tree-hugging’ NGOs, for example, suddenly become invested in issues of racial justice and gender equality.

The main argument of this chapter is that recent years have seen the emergence of new paradigm — the ‘cartel NGO’ — that requires new thinking on the relationships that define the transnational pathway of global politics. If the catch-all NGO is pictured as a ‘transmission belt’ that originates in global civil society, the final type of NGO that I identify in this chapter is defined by its *delinking* from global civil society, discarding the democratic mandate that drives and legitimates the operations of the three other types. This ‘cartel NGO’ eschews public representation, with an agenda set not by grassroots membership but by executive leadership that sees the membership as *consumers* — rather than *cadre* — of their non-profit mission. Rather than operating through a distributed model of governance, cartel NGOs are highly centralized and largely closed to the mass public. Its role, therefore, leans toward “disciplining dissent” rather than voicing it (Choudry and Shragge 2013). Much as cartel parties act as agents of the state, so the cartel NGO is defined by its “professionalization, collaboration with, and recognition and support from the state and/or international institutions, and a detachment from more critical forms of resistance” (Ibid., 503).

To investigate these dynamics of cartelization, I develop a case study of Amnesty International, an international human rights organization that counts on the “collective power of 10 million people” (Amnesty 2021). Amnesty offers an analytically powerful case for three main reasons.

First, its long lifespan — founded in 1961, well before the so-called ‘Third Wave’ of globalization — makes it possible to trace organizational evolution through all four ideal types identified in this chapter: from its origins as a small cadre of legally trained activists, to its subsequent transformation into a mass-membership organization, to its later expansion into a professionalized catch-all NGO. Few other NGOs span these historical eras so continuously or so visibly. Second, Amnesty occupies a structurally dominant position in the NGO ecosystem. As one of the world’s most recognized human rights organizations, consistently ranked among the “Big NGOs” (Stroup and Wong 2018), it operates in a dense and competitive field where cartelization pressures should be especially strong; if cartelization represents a systemic shift in the governance of global civil society, we would expect it to manifest most clearly in a large, resource-rich, and highly institutionalized organization such as Amnesty. Third, Amnesty’s dual positioning — simultaneously presenting itself as a grassroots “movement” while functioning as a global bureaucracy embedded in elite governance venues — provides an ideal vantage point for observing the tensions between representation, professionalization, and organizational self-preservation that underpin the cartel NGO model.

For these reasons, Amnesty serves as a theory-generative case. Its unusually long institutional arc, its prominent role across multiple eras of the NGO ecosystem, and the extensive empirical record available to researchers make it possible not merely to *apply* the cartel NGO framework, but to *develop* it. Over the course of 18 months in 2023 and 2024, I conducted over 30 interviews with current and former Amnesty executives, staff, members, researchers, and volunteers, using Amnesty’s trajectory to refine and evaluate the theoretical expectations of the cartel NGO. The interview data suggest that Amnesty has passed through each of these stages in its 60-year development — cadre, mass, and catch-all — before entering a contemporary phase characterized by growing disconnection from global civil society, claiming to harvest collective power without representing collective preferences.

The evidence of cartelization thus allows us to update our understanding about the role of NGOs in the new politics of globalization. Against traditional theories of the “principled NGO” (Clark 2001) grounded exclusively in norms and ideals, scholars like Cooley and Ron (2002) have suggested that NGOs behave more like market actors, ‘scrambling’ for resources and seeking strategic advantage against their competitors without regard for the cost to their core mission. But

few studies have traced the evolution of that market. Building from Bush and Hadden's (2019) recent work on the "density" of the NGO ecosystem, I illustrate the radical change in that market structure — from the highly-competitive and under-regulated market of Cooley and Ron's 'scramble' to a dense, saturated, and cartelized market dominated by so-called BINGOs (Big NGOs) with multiplied forums, convergent agendas, and a highly-structured relationship to the state (Stroup and Wong 2016, 2017).

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. In the following section, I examine the existing literature on the role of NGOs in the new politics of globalization, looking specifically across three dimensions — their relationship to global civil society, their relationship to global governance institutions, and their relationship to other NGOs. I then turn to develop the theory of the cartel NGO, presenting a general framework that accounts for the broader evolution of NGOs through the last half-century of globalization. In the fourth section, I present the case study of Amnesty International, articulating the dimensions of Amnesty's evolution and their relationship to the theoretical framework of the cartel NGO. I conclude by exploring the implications of these data for our theoretical understanding of the role of transnational actors in the new politics of globalization — and articulating a new research agenda for scholars of global civil society.

LITERATURE

What is the role of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the new politics of globalization? The answers to this question have changed through the course of the past half-century of globalization. Scholars have documented a much longer history of NGOs that predates this 'wave' of globalization, tracking the emergence, development, and evolution of similar transnational networks through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries (see Boli and Thomas 1999; Davies 2014). But increased attention to those networks has coincided with a perceived "power shift" (Mathews 1997) in the global system, as the traditional place of the nation-states and intergovernmental organizations — organized in and empowered by the Westphalian system — was displaced by new actors organizing across their borders. Against the former, a

powerful set of supranational institutions such as the IMF and World Bank rose to supersede the sovereign claims of nation-states with respect to their economic and social policies (Kentikelenis and Babb 2019). Against the latter, transnational advocacy networks — often organized in NGOs — assumed increasing responsibility to challenge those supranational institutions in defense of democratic norms (Korey 2001). “We have less money and fewer resources than Amnesty International, and we are the arm of the UN for human rights,” said the head of the UN Centre for Human Rights in 1993 (Mathews 1997, 53). While the UN representative found this outcome “ridiculous,” scholars largely converged on the view that NGOs had become an indispensable actor for the provision of services and protection of humanitarian standards. As Willetts (2011) put it, “without NGOs, there would have been no international law of human rights” (69). The world was understood to be undergoing a “global associational revolution” (Salamon 1994, 109).

In recent years, however, scholars across the fields of sociology, political science, and international relations have interrogated the role of NGOs and its evolution since the early perception of a “power shift” in their favor. Studies have examined the diversity of their organizational forms (e.g. Murdie and Davis 2012), as well as their organizational function (e.g. Prakash and Gugerty 2010). This section aims to capture these theoretical debates across their three main dimensions: *within* NGOs, or the internal relationships that these organizations sustain with their members, staff, and broader proposed constituency; *beyond* NGOs, or the relationships they establish with the institutions of global governance they aim to influence; and *between* NGOs, or the relationships they develop with similar organizations operating through the space of global civil society. The goal of this section is not only to articulate the diverse camps of the literature on NGOs, or the competing claims about their place in the new politics of globalization. It is also to make the argument that these theories have co-evolved with the ecosystem of NGOs, setting up the diachronic theoretical framework that I lay out in the next section of this chapter.

DIMENSION #1: WITHIN

The first dimension through which we can trace the theoretical approach to NGOs is from inside of them. From where do NGOs emerge? How do they fix their form and how do they define their function? And how have those processes changed over time? The first approach, which coincides with early literature from the third wave of globalization, emphasized the *organic* nature of their internal development. This camp locates the origin of NGOs to the emergence of a new “global civil society” in the early 1990s (Don 2008). According to these theorists, this wave of globalization saw “growing interconnectedness, increased travel and communication” (Kaldor 2003, 587) that facilitated the formation of a new, global community capable of organizing across borders about issues of common importance (Castells 1999). As the dominant issues of late twentieth century rose in scale — from nuclear war to environmental collapse (Beck 1992) — so the need intensified for new institutions to address them, from the International Monetary Fund to the World Trade Organization. And just as national civil societies were forged through domestic processes of institutionalization (Tilly 1984), so globalization gave rise to a global civil society: a “process through which individuals negotiate, argue, struggle against or agree with each and with the centres of political and economic authority,” in the words of Kaldor (2003: 585); “a bazaar, a covered kaleidoscope of differently sized rooms, twisting alleys, steps leading to obscure places, people and goods in motion,” in the words of Keane (2003: 41).

According to this first camp, NGOs emerged out of this new space of global civil society. Many of these organizations — such as the International Committee of the Red Cross — may predate this period, but the rapid acceleration of NGO formation corresponded to the construction of a new “global technological civilization” (Havel 2018). As citizens in different countries developed the capacity to organize across borders, so they formed new “transnational advocacy networks” (Keck and Sikkink 1999) to promote their respective agendas. While those networks may have exhibited a loose or amorphous dynamic in their infancy, they in turn forged NGOs as the organizational form through which their advocacy was made possible. The theoretical approaches to NGOs that emerged from this primordial era in the development of global civil society thus illustrate a high degree of conceptual fluidity with respect to the concepts of social movements, advocacy networks, civil society organizations, and NGOs (Tvedt 1998). If civil society was not “conflated”

with the NGO sector (Banks et al 2015), the latter was understood as its institutional incarnation: as Scholte (2000) argued, “civil society” simply referred to “activities by voluntary associations.” It is thus at this time that a large-scale NGO like Amnesty International could describe itself as a “movement” — emphasizing its organic relationship to global civil society — while the dialogues organized by institutions like the World Bank and the IMF in order to engage with civil society were populated exclusively by NGOs (Amoore and Langley 2004). In other words, NGOs were understood to be *in, of, and for* global civil society.

Over time, however — as the space of global civil society became increasingly structured by the organizational dynamics of NGOs — theorists began putting greater emphasis on their role of *representation*. Rather than locating NGOs inside of global civil society, these scholars theorized them as “transmission belts” (Steffeck and Nanz 2008): “First, civil society organizations can give voice to citizens’ concerns and channel them into the deliberative process of international organizations. Second, they can make internal decision-making processes of international organizations more transparent to the wider public and formulate technical issues in accessible terms” (8). NGOs, according to this account, act as “democratizing agents” (Collingwood and Logister 2005), acting on behalf of the global public rather than operating from it. The emphasis on representation coincided with growing scrutiny about the “internal democracy” (Sikkink 2002) of NGOs as the means through which they claim legitimacy. As McLaverty (2002) observed, “there is nothing intrinsically democratic about ‘civil society organizations’” (310). Where previous accounts took for granted the organic relationship between NGOs and the global civil society from which they emerged, these accounts questioned their claims to concrete constituency” in some cases, “they do not give voice to an already constituted group, but they are rather acting as ‘constituency entrepreneurs’” (Peruzzoti 2010, 163). As David Rieff asked in 1999, “So who elected the NGOs?”

Growing concerns about the representative legitimacy of NGOs thus gave way to a third conception of their relationship to global civil society: *accountability*. By the turn of the century, global governance institutions like the World Bank and IMF had established annual meetings to engage with civil society organizations, while virtually all UN conferences offered access to accredited NGOs (Sankey 1996). As these global governance institutions turned to NGOs in order

to secure their own seal of legitimacy on the world stage, so the question emerged about whether these organizations acted as “democratizing agents” or simply mouthpieces of the “loud minority” (Zakaria 2000). Theoretical emphasis therefore turned away from the “input” legitimacy of representation and toward the “throughout” legitimacy of accountability. If the internal dynamics of NGOs no longer guaranteed an organic relationship to civil society, then NGOs would have to “signal” (Gugerty and Kremer 2008), self-regulate (Deloffre 2016), and quantify their accountability to it (Schmitz, Raggo, and Vijfeijken 2012). NGOs were unburdened by the task of representation, but rather bound to exercises of transparency (Berghmans et al 2017), dialogue (Cavill and Sohail 2007), consultation (Crack 2013): “The glory of civil society institutions ought to be that they are not representative, and because they are not, are free to argue and shout their visions of social justice, seek to persuade, offer alternatives that representative institutions cannot (Anderson, 2009: 11). Increasingly staffed by professionals and bureaucratic managers, NGOs did not “have to be member-controlled to be legitimate, but they do have to accountable for what they do” (Edwards and Hulme 1996: 14).

In the fourth and final approach, the questions of NGO internal dynamics have been displaced by concerns for the *impact* of their operations (Broome et al. 2018). Recent scholarship takes as its premise that these organizations neither emerge organically from global civil society, nor legitimate their operations with reference to its priorities. Rather, according to this account, NGOs increasingly pursue their own professional authority (Stroup and Wong 2017), seeking *output* legitimacy on the basis of targets and benchmarks those professionals design on their own (Broome and Quirk 2015) — less to correspond with the needs of a perceived constituency, and more to correspond with the demands of donor organizations that seek evidence of high performance (Brown 2008; Gneezy et al. 2014; Pallas et al. 2015). As Maryam Zarnegar Deloffre and Hans Peter Schmitz (2019, 616) note, “all major NGOs have increased their spending on monitoring and evaluation as well as expanded their capacities to track outcome and impact.” Such a shift coincided with a general trend toward professionalization that brought methods of “new public management” into NGOs, importing frameworks of measurement and evaluation (M&E) into NGOs that once considered themselves movement actors operating in the great bazaar of global civil society (Mitchell 2013). The end result was to turn the original theories of NGOs’ internal dynamics on their head: “In the process of seeking to transform... many civil society actors have

themselves been transformed: both become more technocratic and increasingly moved toward advocating positions that accord with the dominant neoliberal paradigm” (Hopewell 2015, 1130).

By articulating these diverse theoretical approaches to the organizational dynamics of NGOs, we can see how they have assumed very different positions with respect to ordinary people’s preferences over globalization. In some instances, NGOs have been understood to be the sole vehicle through those preferences find voice or representation on the world stage. In other instances, NGOs have been understood to instrumentalize those preferences for priorities set independently of them. As an organizational form, NGOs have existed throughout the course of globalization’s many waves; as Davies (2014) has shown, NGOs have originated from all corners of the planet, and have existed for at least the two centuries through which scholars have traced processes of transnational political dynamics. The most recent wave of globalization saw the reactivation of that organizational form as an accompaniment to the emergence of a new global civil society. But to make sense of their broader role in the new politics of globalization today, it is critical to interrogate closely the internal operations of NGOs and the ways in which those evolving dynamics *within* these organizations shape their own perception — and execution — of their stated mission.

DIMENSION #2: BEYOND

We now turn to the second key dimension: the relationship between NGOs and the institutions of global governance they seek to influence. How do NGOs pursue influence over these institutions? What are the relationships they develop with the decision-makers operating inside those institutions? And how have those relationships changed over time as the NGOs ecosystem has matured? Here, too, we see a diversity of theoretical approaches to answer these questions. Some of this variation can be explained by the different issue areas taken up by NGOs: organizations dedicated to security issues, for example, may develop more pragmatic approaches to their interaction with states — concerned about potential backlash from anxious regimes (Carpenter 2017; Dupuy et al 2016) — than those dedicated to climate issues, where NGOs feel compelled to

force these onto institutions that would rather wish them away (Allan 2020). Yet much of this variation can also be explained by the development of NGOs themselves, which “increasingly interact” with global governance institutions “as the size and prominence of NGOs has grown globally” (Stroup 2019, 39). Over time, through the maturation of this ecosystem, scholars have turned to examine the strategic choices of NGOs in their pursuit of relevance, authority, and resources (Reimann 2006). In her review of the literature on those strategic choices, Stroup (2019) identifies four main categories: *conflict*, *competition*, *cooperation*, and *cooptation*. I review these here — but point to a fifth category missing from her review that will be critical to this chapter’s assessment of the cartel NGO.

The first category is *conflict*, which appears most prominently in the literature on NGOs as an organic outgrowth of global civil society that flourished in the 1990s. According to this account, NGOs emerged as a form of “globalized resistance” (Smith 2001) to the increasingly contentious processes of globalization: vehicles of contention, disruption, and mobilization seeking “the most favorable arenas in which to fight their battles,” according to Keck and Sikkink (1999, 217). This conflictual premise of the early literature on NGOs in GCS is well-illustrated by their concept of “boomerang effects”: civil society actors, facing foreclosed prospects of domestic reform, turn to the transnational sphere to attract attention and shift blame for domestic failures from the world community (Sikkink 2002). Another example is the “spiral model” (Risse and Sikkink 1999), in which local forces seek the unraveling of their regime’s illiberal institutions by calling on transnational solidarities. Both are tactics to challenge and “resist” powerful global governance institutions by deploying weapons of the relatively weak (Falk 1998; Scholte 1999), as exemplified in the so-called ‘Battle for Seattle’, when representatives of that primordial global civil society faced off against the World Trade Organization and the police deployed to repress the protests at their ministerial meeting (Levi and Olson 2000; Kaldor 2000; Gill 2000; Wainwright and Prudham 2000; Smith 2001).

Stroup’s second category is *cooperation*. According to this interpretation, NGOs have evolved past the phase of disruption to assume important responsibilities in the field of global governance — and are even considered to have a “special capacity” to do so, in contrast to the frequently incompetent bureaucrats and ‘transgovernmental’ (Slaughter 1997) actors that came to govern the

globe (Fowler 1991). The shift toward a more cooperative mode of engagement with NGOs as external actors was not only facilitated by their internal development, but also by the reciprocal transformation of global governance institutions themselves. International organizations have “indeed undergone a far-reaching institutional transformation over the past 60 years,” write Tallberg et al (2013, 2), toward greater openness, collaboration, and access to NGOs; “protests and legitimization-driven reforms remain the exception.” NGOs and international organizations are not understood to represent opposing interests, but rather to play complementary roles in pursuit of shared goals: “NGO participation provides policy advice, helps monitor commitments and delegations, minimizes ratification risk, and facilitates signaling between governments and constituents” (Raustiala 1997, 720).

The increasing assumption of global governance responsibilities leads to a third category of external interactions: *competition*. Stroup points out that NGOs compete for attention, credibility, and competencies over critical functions such as the provision of aid in war-torn or disaster-affected contexts. As Rubenstein’s (2015) study of humanitarian NGOs suggests, that competition can often lead to disastrous local outcomes, challenging the view of NGOs as “angelic good Samaritans, swashbuckling heroes, or ‘do-gooding machines’” to suggest that the displacement of state capacity can lead to serious “unintended consequences” (2). This, too, has been traced to the dynamic development of the NGO ecosystem and the reciprocal transformation of the global governance system they seek to influence; after the “global associational revolution” (Salamon 1994) came the “NGO decade” (Tvedt 2006), after which these organizations established themselves as a permanent “global third sector” (Tvedt 1998, 18). It is in that context that the UN official complained of the “ridiculous” outcome by which his organization received “less money and fewer resources than Amnesty International” — the direct competition for resources, and the underlying pursuit of credibility that guaranteed them.

Stroup’s final category — *cooptation* — suggests that governments and the global governance institutions may wrestle with the increasing force and presence of NGOs on the world stage by seeking to subsume, swallow, or even steal their style of presentation to achieve a similar degree of legitimacy. She cites the case of ‘government-organized NGOs,’ or GONGOs, which seek to secure the resources over which they once competed on behalf of the state. Spires (2011) describes

the act of cooptation as a kind of “contingent symbiosis” (1) through which states — in his case, the authoritarian state of China, otherwise inclined to crush or marginalized the third sector — can coexist with NGOs, so long as they can take the credit for their good works. NGOs continue to exist — with increasing access to international organizations (Tallberg et al. 2013) — precisely because international organizations grant them that access in a desperate bid to legitimate their own undemocratic decisions (Stephen and Zurn 2019). By this account, the early conflict between top-down and bottom-up globalization collapses; far from representing the ‘global resistance’ against neoliberal globalization, NGOs were deployed to build the “ideological bridges between the small scale capitalists and the monopolies benefitting from privatization—all in the name of “anti-statism” and the building of civil societies” (Petras 1997).

Yet Stroup overlooks a fifth category of interactions between NGOs and the institutions they seek to influence — one that inverts adjusts the terms of cooptation to account for the ways in which NGOs can *conspire* with those institutions to protect their own organizational interests over and above those of the constituency they claim to represent. Many scholars have challenged the norm-based view of NGOs that prevailed in the early days of the primordial global civil society to depict them as self-interested “interest groups” (Bloodgood 2011) that “scramble” for resources (Cooley and Ron 2002) and “instrumentalize” their principles to adapt to external constraints (Mitchell and Schmitz 2014) — often engaging in a mutually beneficial back-scratching exchange with international organizations and national states. This dynamic of conspiracy is similar to the “contingent symbiosis” described by Spires (2011), but assumes greater agency for the NGOs equally coopting states to burnish their credentials and establish their authority (Stroup and Wong 2017). This approach also collapses the difference between top-down and bottom-up dynamics, but understands that collapse as a “two-way process” (Reimann 2006); if international organizations benefit from the legitimating presence of NGOs, for example, the latter benefit from their legitimating access to the former as evidence of their effectiveness. This latter dynamic thus coincides with the turn toward “impact” as the defining criterion of NGO legitimacy, as opposed to earlier pursuits of representation and accountability. Larger NGOs operating in a mature ecosystem are expected to interact with — and ultimately influence — the states they lobby (Stroup and Wong 2017), whereas smaller NGOs operating in a less developed ecosystem “may proclaim independence as a marker of their legitimacy and default to harsh criticisms of states”

(Stroup 2019, 37). From a “contingent symbiosis”, that interaction may even take the form of *parasitic symbiosis*, through which states and international organizations gain legitimacy, but NGOs capture large sums of material resources — often to the detriment of their own stated missions (Gent et al 2015). In those cases, the founding premise of NGOs as a ‘third sector’ is stripped away, appearing less as non-governmental actors than non-non-governmental ones seeking rents from their proximity to the organizations they claim to contest (Clarke 2019).

The addition of *conspiracy* to the categories set out in Stroup’s review thus provides theoretical leverage to help resolve the puzzle set out in this chapter, namely the declining rates of NGO foundings after decades of their acceleration. If the NGO ecosystem has become increasingly inhospitable, then we must also develop the theoretical tools to make sense of the how certain NGOs succeed to survive. Just as theories of the cartel party explained the persistence of unpopular parties presiding over ‘hollow’ democracies (Mair 2013) — engaged in their own parasitic relationship to the state they propose to transform — so this chapter proposes the concept of the cartel NGO to explain how large and ineffective third sector organizations survive, and thrive, even as the hope for their resistance to neoliberal globalization has faded.

DIMENSION #3: BETWEEN

The third and final dimension that runs through the literature on role of NGOs in the new politics of globalization is the one that connects these organizations to each other. How do NGOs relate to similar actors operating in, through, and out of global civil society? What kind of relationships do they develop to achieve their stated, and unstated, goals? And how do those relationships evolve as the broader organizational field evolves along with them? Here, too, we find accounts that emphasize the diachronic variation alongside those that emphasize its synchronic one. Over the course of the past half-century, not only have NGOs “aged” (Bush and Hadden 2019, 1135) — with many of the older NGOs such as Oxfam and Amnesty reaching multi-decade millstones — but the broader population has become “highly dense and mature” (Ibid., 1145). The combination of these internal and external dynamics thus raises questions about how NGOs

collaborate, compete, and — as I will argue in this section — collude in order to survive in an increasingly challenging organizational ecosystem.

Early theories about the emergence of global civil society tended to emphasize the *collaboration* between them. These theories tended to assume an “equality between these actors” (Wong 2012, 37) as novel, scrappy representatives of third sector counterposed to states and international organizations. Grounded in norms and principles, NGOs related to each other according to the logic of collective action (Brysk 1993) based on a new collective identity (Alvarez and Escobar 1993) forged through the process of internationalization. In her studies of the struggle for democratization in India and Argentina, Brysk (1993, 1996) offers the concept of “peer lobbies” to describe these collaborative dynamics. That collaboration was not necessarily segregated by issue area; as Lipschutz (1992) pointed out, the flourishing of the NGO ecosystem saw the “increasing linkage” between human rights groups and environmental organizations, arising from a shared concerns that “large scale, environmentally destructive projects often displace large numbers of the poor and disempowered, whose rights to land are routinely ignored” (395). The ‘networking’ of NGOs, according to this approach, is understood as a sign of their strength, enabling these organizations to multiply their influence to be greater than the sum of their individual parts (Sikkink 1993; Wapner 1995; Clark 1995).

Yet as a new wave of NGO foundings filled out the international third sector, so a new theoretical approach emerged to describe the *competitive* dynamics between them. In their recent article, Bush and Hadden (2019) note that the share of the resources dominated by the top 1 percent of NGOs in the conservation sector fell from 72 to 52 percent between 1992 and 2010; as a result, “the era of mutual support had clearly ended by the mid-2000s” (1134). This camp of the literature begins from a very different theoretical premise as the one that preceded it. NGOs were not, by this account, engaged in the innocent articulation of peer networks glued together by common concerns; on the contrary, they were understood to be strategic actors competing for limited resources in a marketplace of funding, attention, and influence. In their seminal article on the NGO ‘scramble,’ Cooley and Ron (2002) set out this dynamic logic clearly: “the growing number of Ios and NGOs within a given transnational sector increases uncertainty, competition, and insecurity for all organizations in that sector” (6). Such a marketplace could be understood to enhance the

performance of NGOs in pursuit of their stated missions; after all, economists have long emphasized the gains to innovation and growth that flow from such market dynamics (Baumol 2002). Yet theorists of NGO dynamics have repeatedly warned that “competition exacerbates their dysfunctional qualities” (Balboa 2017, 118). In their study of women’s community associations in Kenya, for example, Gugerty and Kramer (2008) find that this competition marginalized the disadvantage and warped their hitherto horizontal governance structure toward elites with little grounding in the communities their organizations claimed to represent. The form and the function of NGOs, in other words, was forever altered by the market competition in which they began to engage (Bob 2005).

Yet while scores of studies have highlighted the competitive relationship between NGOs, far fewer have examined how the nature of that competition may have changed over time. If NGOs are indeed operating in a “marketplace” (Cooley and Ron 2002), then we might understand the relationship between NGOs by making sense of the underlying market structure. In economics, a new wave of scholarship has drawn attention to the questions of market concentration (Khan and Vaheesan 2017), or the increasing dominance of specific firms that deploy their market power (Sokolova and Sorensen 2021; Yeh et al. 2022) to reduce the scope of competition and warp their outcomes as a result. To explain the emergence of this “monopsony” (Naidu and Dube 2024), economists have pointed to dynamics of *collusion* through which firms coordinate to maintain their dominant position (Azar and Marinescu 2024). Such anti-competitive dynamics are understood to require strong forms of regulatory intervention in order to reduce market concentration and improve resulting outcomes (Khan 2018).

The theoretical framework of this chapter, which I set out in the section that follows, aims to apply these insights to the NGO marketplace. Recent years have seen a similar concentration of resources in a handful of non-governmental organizations; as Foster and Fine (2007) point out, “since 1970, more than 200,000 nonprofits have opened in the U.S., but only 144 of them have reached \$50 million in annual revenue” (46). Stroup and Wong (2018) extend this analysis across “a number of sectors at both domestic and international levels” to show that “a small group of NGOs control a disproportionate share of resources and enjoy hugely disproportionate attention” — labelling these organizations the Big NGOs, or BINGOs. Yet the international third sector is largely

unregulated; there is, for example, no Federal Trade Commission to police the market for NGOs, and no mandate to pursue anti-trust measures that reduce their concentration. In that context, scholars may question how these organizations maintain their positions of dominance. Many studies have described the unbalanced nature of this “cartel of good intentions” (Easterly 2002), articulating the ways in which large NGOs act as “gatekeepers” (Bob 2005; Carpenter 2007) that bully, police, and control the smaller players in their market — or, through a process that Allan (2020) dubs “forum multiplication,” expand their mandates to account for issues that traditionally belong to their competitors: a kind of anti-competitive horizontal integration. In their study of the Accountability Charter, Stroup and Wong (2017) show how BINGOs collude to prop up their credentials as legitimate and “accountable” organizations, while keeping the smaller organizations — with fewer resources to pay for membership of the Charter — out. “Rather than reshaping the NGO sector,” they write, “the AC has reinforced pre-existing ties among powerful NGOs like Transparency International, Amnesty, Greenpeace, and Oxfam, maintaining a small club of leading NGOs” (116). Here — once again — the premise of the early optimism around NGO collaboration is turned on its head. The linkage between issues of environment and human rights does not lead their respective organizations to flourish as constitutive parts of a single network. Instead, through “forum multiplication,” one organization assumes the dominant role of representing both issues, and abuses that dominance to reduce the market prospects of the other. It is with this emergent dynamic of collusion that I turn now to develop the theory of the ‘cartel NGO.’

THEORY

The previous section made two key claims of the existing literature on the role of NGOs in the new politics of globalization. The first is that scholars have identified variation across multiple dimensions of their political dynamics — specifically, their relationship to the *global civil society*, their relationship to *global governance institutions*, and their relationship *to each other*. The second claim of the previous section is that scholars have traced that variation *over time*. From the primordial phase of global civil society to the hypertrophic NGOs that manage multimillion-dollar budgets; from the early days of ‘globalized resistance’ against global governance to the symbiotic relationships developed to support them; from the pattern of mutual aid among NGOs to the fierce competition for resources, attention, and influence — the dimensions of NGO’s political dynamics have co-evolved as the ecosystem of this international third sector has expanded, crowded, and matured over time. Yet there are few theories that provide an arching framework that can account for these dynamic transformations. The sudden “decline and stagnation” of the NGO space — once considered boundless — is “puzzling from the perspective of existing theory, necessitating new thinking,” write Bush and Hadden (2019). While many studies have examined the long-term trajectory of NGOs as seen from the perspective of their outcomes on international development (e.g. Brass et al 2018), far fewer have sought to combine these external dynamics with an account of NGOs’ internal ones. Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015), for example, make a critical distinction between member-based organizations (MBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) — the former more oppositional, the latter more accommodating in their relationships to the state; the former more accountable to members, the latter more accountable to donors — they do not provide a holistic framework that can account for that distinction as a dynamic, evolutionary process.

This section aims to provide such a holistic framework. Building from the seminal insights of Banks et al. (2015) on ‘NGOs, States, and Donors,’ I seek to apply the *political economy* approach to articulate a theory of NGOs’ evolving role in the new politics of globalization that can help to explain “how NGOs respond strategically to their resource environments” (Bush and Hadden 2019, 1135), and how those strategies change according to the structure of their broader organizational ecology (Abbott et al 2016). To do so, I borrow from a rich set of theoretical tools

applied with a similar political approach to sphere of party systems by Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1995, 2009). Their theoretical framework set out to capture the evolution of party systems over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as expressed across dimensions that ranged from their style of representation to their pattern of electoral competition. Their basic insight was that parties, like NGOs, are strategic actors in pursuit of scarce resources, which therefore seek to structure the market in ways that guarantee dominance over those resources — an insight that harkens back to Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967) seminal work on voter alignments. Katz and Mair track the evolution of parties and their competitive ecosystems across four ideal types: *cadre*, *mass*, *catch-all*, and *cartel*. For each, they articulate core attributes, and the drivers of the broader system’s evolution from one party type to the other. This includes the character of membership, and the drift of political parties away from the civil societies out of which they emerged. They also theorize the style of work, and the shift from labor-intensive methods that require sustained mobilization to capital-intensive methods that rely heavily on mediatic interventions. Finally, they cover the mode of legitimation, from organic representation to efficient management (see Katz and Mair 1995, 18).

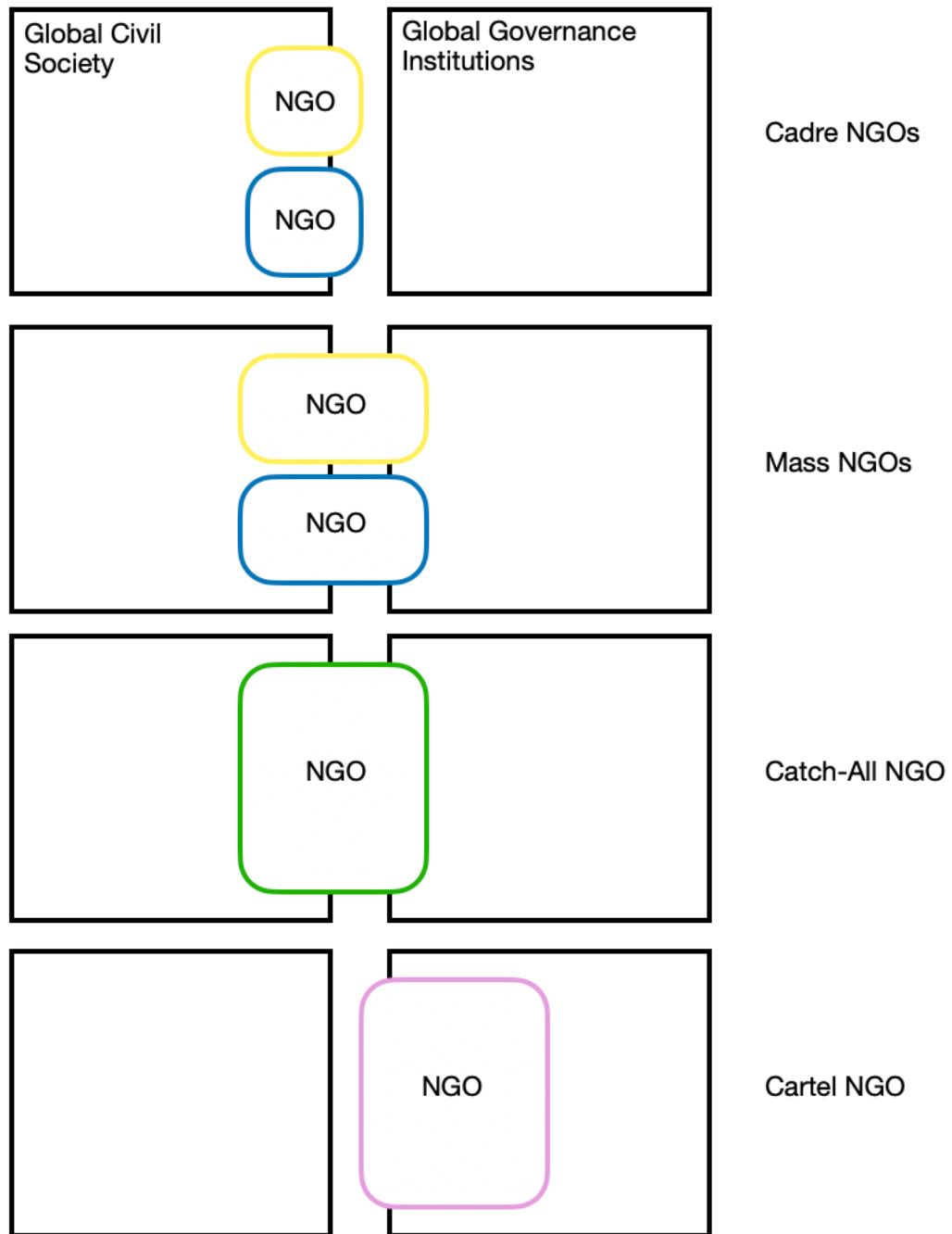
The principal contribution of this chapter is to bring this theoretical framework into the study of NGOs and their role in the new politics of globalization. Over the past half-century, I argue, we can trace the evolution of NGOs across these four ideal types: *cadre*, *mass*, *catch-all*, and — as I will argue in the empirical case study to follow — *cartel*. I illustrate their differences in Figure 16 and articulate the types of NGO and their characteristics in Table 4.1 to follow.

The first phase of development saw the emergence of *cadre* NGOs. These are the organizations described by theorists like Keck and Sikkink (1999): small, people-powered movements, often articulated at sites of local resistance before internationalizing across borders to become networks. In other words, cadre NGOs were situated *inside* the space of global civil society in order to respond to the growing, organic demands of the new “global technological civilization” (Havel 2018). The tactics of these organizations were constrained not only by their access to resources, relying heavily on labor-intensive modes of mobilization that called directly on the time and money of the activists that comprised their membership. They were also constrained by the closed political opportunity structure of the global governance institutions against which they were

arrayed. The cadre NGO thus recalls the 1999 Battle for Seattle, during which fair trade advocates rallied outside the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization; or the Battle of Brent Spar, during which Greenpeace occupied a North Sea oil tanker to protest its disposal. Membership of the cadre NGO, in this sense, was *thick*, involving extensive personal commitments and entire identities organized around a specific cause. Those causes, meanwhile, were highly delimited by their issue area: groups fighting for human rights, for example, did not necessarily coordinate with those protecting the environment. Figure 16 portrays these distinct causes in yellow and blue.

The second stage of development saw the emergence of a new kind of NGO — larger in scale and more robust in service: the *mass* NGO. Such organizations remained firmly grounded in the norms, demands, and priorities of global civil society, but the sphere of global civil society — once constrained to a small subset of the population clued into new information technologies such as computers and the Internet — had grown to include large swathes of the global population. Mass NGOs took on the role of representing this growing society, with organizations like Greenpeace growing to include millions of members across the world. From small “islands of civic engagement” (Kaldor 2003, 587), mass NGOs were tasked with mobilizing continents. The emergence of mass NGOs coincided with the “opening up” (Tallberg et al. 2013) of the international organizations outside of which they once protested: in 2000, the OECD organized its first annual Forum for civil society organizations; in 2001, the World Trade Organization inaugurated its Public Symposium; and in 2002, the World Bank and IMF added a civil society consultation to the front end of their annual meetings in Washington (Coni-Zimmer et al. 2023). Even UN General Secretary Kofi Annan referred to “global people power” as the “best thing for the United Nations” in his 1999 speech to the World Civil Society Conference. The presentation of the third sector evolved accordingly. Rather than relying on personal networks of identified activists, NGOs developed large-scale infrastructure to support their operations. Amnesty International, for example, transformed from a grassroots network of letter-writing cadre to a global institution with an International Secretariat in London and national chapters across the world. Nonetheless, the tactics of mass NGOs remained heavily labor-intensive; Amnesty International, for example, continued to rely on networks of volunteers to raise the majority of its money from individuals on the street.

FIGURE 16: TYPES OF NGOS



If the second phase of NGO development corresponded to the sudden expansion of global civil society, the third corresponded to its maturation. Here, as scholars have recently documented (Bush and Hadden 2019; Stroup 2019), we can observe a marked shift from inter-NGO dynamics grounded in collaboration to new ones based on fierce competition in a new ‘scramble’ for resources (Cooley and Ron 2002). Under pressure to pursue the new pots of money available to the growing third sector, NGOs began to exhibit patterns of professionalization, replacing grassroots and amateur activists that once formed their core cadres with credentialed professionals often trained in the new fields of human rights and global governance that flourished across tertiary education in the 2000s. In this process, we see an increasing emphasis on questions of “accountability,” with NGOs designing elaborate schemes to legitimate their claims to representation (Schmitz, Raggo, and Vijfeijken 2012), rather than being led by the communities affected by their stated mission. No longer grounded in the grassroots of global civil society, these NGOs pursued ‘catch-all’ strategies to maximize their access to key resources, leading to “multiple undesirable consequences,” according to Banks et al (2016): “Participatory approaches have been eroded or depoliticized, cultural sensitivity has been reduced, local ties have been weakened, and ultimately, core values have been diluted as NGOs become the implementers of donor policy rather than independent actors” (710). It is that loss of independence that defines the catch-all NGO; rather than representing the constituency out of which they were born, catch-all NGOs could only serve as “transmission belts” (Steffeck and Nanz 2008) to relay claims and concerns to the global governance institutions they once contested. In some cases, the transmission mechanism led NGOs to narrow their priorities to align with those institutions. But in many others, intensified competition led NGOs to take on increasing numbers of issues far outside their original field in order to tap into multiple sources of potential funding; Greenpeace, for example, began working on issues of racial justice, just as European Network on Debt and Development began working on issues of gender and climate justice. In Figure 16, I illustrate this dynamic by combining the distinct yellow and blue NGOs into a single green catch-all NGO, corresponding to the emergence of so-called BINGOs (Stroup and Wong 2018). As Weber warned a century ago, the bureaucratization of NGOs not only created an increasingly homogenous organization field (DiMaggio and Powell 2004) — with catch-all NGOs no longer differentiated by issue area or geographic site of resistance — but also drove them to prioritize their own survival over the execution of their stated mission.

Beyond articulating a general theoretical framework for the evolving role of NGOs in the new politics of globalization, the empirical contention of this chapter is that we have a fourth phase of that evolution that corresponds to a new type of NGO — a *cartel* NGO, oriented around this emergent goal of guaranteeing its own survival. Where earlier theories of global civil society tended to conflate it with non-governmental organizations, the cartel NGO in contrast is marked by its total disconnection (Figure 16). Mass membership, once considered a defining feature of NGOs and their legitimate claims to represent global civil society, is deactivated; even as BINGOs like Greenpeace and Amnesty claim to operate as ‘movements’ with millions of members, their operations have largely made them obsolete beyond their financial contributions. Decision-making is increasingly centralized at the executive level of these organizations, structured — as the unregulated market of the third sector would suggest — as corporations, with CEOs, CFOs, and a suite of Vice Presidents. Consider the case of Oxfam America, governed by a CEO with a Master’s degree in ‘International Administration’ and 30 years of experience in the field of humanitarianism. As with catch-all organizations that preceded them, the cartel NGO seeks to occupy the broad field across the full spectrum of its forums; in the case of Oxfam America, the CEO profile boasts a mission to advocate “for economic justice, gender equality, climate action, and rights and dignity in crisis.” The deactivation of mass membership coincides with the capture of large-scale resources and new capital-intensive tactics for their advocacy. Oxfam America’s 2023 budget came to \$80 million total — a far cry from the scrappy cadre NGOs that mobilized their personal resources to contest, occupy, and resist the forces of globalization — with salaries for its professional staff that totaled \$24 million. Such capital intensity can be traced through those expenditures: Oxfam America’s VP for Resource Development officer made \$293,000 in 2023 (with a \$45,000 bonus), second only to the CEO (\$480,000 with a \$48,000 bonus); meanwhile, the NGO paid out \$2.3 million dollars to donor organizing agency GiveBridge, and another \$1.13 million to Blue State Digital. These firms specialize in digital campaigns and media strategy, shifting the axis of NGO action from mass mobilization to online posts and petitions. In that sense, the cartel NGO no longer derives its legitimacy from its capacity to put people on the streets in service of their cause; rather, they exhibit the ‘parasitic symbiosis’ defined in the previous section, seeking to secure access to the global governance institutions in order to demonstrate their capacity to influence its decisions, even if it means moderating their message to toward “regime

compatibility” (Bush 2015). Cartel NGOs may still compete for resources, but that market is increasingly structured by the “gatekeeper” organizations (Bob 2005) and the personal relationships that their executives develop with donors. It is for this reason that cartel NGOs exhibit a revolving door pattern at the executive level; Oxfam America’s CEO was transferred over from her executive role at CARE USA, which counted an annual revenue of nearly \$900 million in 2023. Just as with the cartel party, the emergence of the cartel NGO thus marks a new phase in which civil society no longer “limits or controls” the institutions of global governance (Katz and Mair 1995, 22), but rather — by through the increasing monopsony of the third sector — one in which cartel NGOs limit and control the expressions of civil society (Bush and Hadden 2019).

TABLE 7: TYPES OF NGO AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Dimension	Cadre	Mass	Catch-all	Cartel
Membership	Restricted, Highly identified	Large but homogenous, Issue-oriented	Open, Heterogeneous, Passive	Irrelevant, Deactivated
Structure	Grassroots, Deliberative	Regional, Bureaucratized	Global, Centralized	Stratified, Professionalized
Financing	Personal contributions	Member donations	Acquisition via general public	Donor tracking and data sharing
Agenda	Delimited by cause	Delimited by issue specialization	Multiplied by opportunity	Moderated, Consensus
Campaigns	Personal networks	Labor-intensive	Labor-intensive and capital-intensive	Capital-intensive
Leadership	Organic	Delegated	Professionalized, Credentialed	Executive, Insider
Legitimation	Resistance	Representation	Accountability	Access

Table 7 lays out the full theoretical framework across the NGO types and their characteristics. There, I aim to articulate the various dimensions across which these NGO types vary, from their internal dynamics to their external relationships. The claim is not that the cartel NGO has replaced wholesale the organizational types that preceded it; on the contrary, new non-governmental organizations continue to emerge — many of them with the express mission to challenge the BINGOs they perceive to have corrupted their core mission. Neither is the argument that all such BINGOs can be categorized in the cartel model. Even amid a growing tendency toward cartelization, these organizations may exhibit features that run across the columns of the Table. Rather, as in Katz and Mair (1995), the aim is to articulate models that “represent heuristically convenient polar types” (19), and in doing so, to help resolve the puzzle set out in the introduction to this chapter — namely, the sudden stagnation in the ecosystem of NGOs, the hyper-concentration of resources in a handful of BINGOs, and its consequences for our conception of their role in the new politics of globalization. I turn now to test the cartelization thesis through a detailed case study of an NGO operating in that stagnating space.

CASE

The previous section set out a general theoretical framework for the evolution of NGOs over the course of the most recent wave of globalization. The section concluded by positing the emergence of a new category of non-governmental organizations — *cartel* NGOs — that demonstrate radically different form and function in the system of global governance as compared to the *cadre* NGOs that preceded them. But do cartel NGOs exist? How do they emerge? And what would be the implications of such an empirical finding for our overall assessment of the role of NGOs in the new politics of globalization? The previous section cited relevant examples and key statistics to suggest that cartelization may be underway. But in order to make the case, it will be necessary to deploy empirical methods that allow for a closer examination of one such non-governmental organization, its internal decision-making processes, and its external relationships, across all three dimensions articulated in the existing literature.

The goal of this section is to provide such a case study — one that can be used as a “tool for evaluation” of the cartel NGO thesis, and the broader articulation of the chapter’s overarching framework (Yin 1992). I understand that framework as a form of ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser and Strauss 1965), “derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents” (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 23). The goal of developing such a holistic framework is to generate theoretical tools — here borrowed from the study of party systems — that facilitate new directions for empirical research. The case study here therefore serves both as the inductive basis for the development of that framework, and as the site through which to apply its insights in order to trace the evolution of NGOs into their contemporary ecosystem (Yin 2009). Such a case study does not strive for generalizability across the universe of non-governmental organizations; nor does it aim to identify a single casual factor that can explain the transition from one NGO type to another. Rather, by investigating the empirical dynamics of NGO evolution, it aims to ground the theory of the cartel NGO in the observed transformation of a single NGO in its ecosystem (Goulding 1998).

Case selection, in that context, presents a challenge. NGOs vary in their areas of interest, in their geographic focus, and — critically for the evolutionary theory presented in this chapter — in their lifespan. The cartel NGO thesis does not require their convergence to a single category; rather, it is focused by its definition on the ‘Big’ NGOs, or BINGOs, that exert overwhelming influence on the broader ecosystem in which they operate (Bush and Hadden 2019). To that end, I follow a ‘crucial-case’ method of case selection (Gerring 2006), pursuing a case “that must closely fit a theory if one is to have confidence in the theory’s validity, or, conversely, must not fit equally well any rule contrary to that proposed” (Eckstein 1975, 118). The case of Amnesty International is one such crucial case: one of the world’s oldest and most recognized human rights NGOs operating at global scale, and the site of extensive scholarship as a result (see Power 2013). Given its size, age, and position, Amnesty offers a crucial case for the study of the dynamics of cartelization (Levy 2008) an organization that continues to promote its credentials as a global grassroots “movement” even as it has positioned itself as a prestige-wielding giant in the field of human rights advocacy. The long-term trajectory of Amnesty’s evolution thus provides an ideal case through which to trace the evolution of NGOs and test the cartel thesis — particularly through its US chapter, where Bush and Hadden (2019) have documented the intensified market competition that has come to shape the NGO ecosystem and the puzzle of its recent stagnation. The goal of the study is to identify the

relationships that Amnesty developed at each stage of its evolution — from *cadre* to *mass* to *catch-all*, and finally, to *cartel*.

To do so, I collected and deployed a wide range of qualitative data that together allow for a close, process-oriented examination of Amnesty International’s evolution, internal practices, and external engagements. The research design follows established best practices in qualitative case-study methodology (George and Bennett 2005; Yin 2009), combining multiple streams of evidence to support both within-case analysis and theory development. First, I conducted an extensive survey of publicly available documentation, including Amnesty’s annual reports, audited financial statements, IRS 990 filings, governance handbooks, strategic plans, communications materials, and public evaluations. These materials provide a baseline account of Amnesty’s formal claims about its mission, structure, and allocation of resources over time. Second, I supplemented these materials with internal documents obtained through interviewees, including internal memos, strategic plans, staff surveys, and governance guidelines. These internal sources enable the critical triangulation between the organization’s external narratives and its internal practices, illuminating discrepancies that would otherwise remain hidden.

Third, I conducted semi-structured interviews with current and former Amnesty executives, staff, researchers, volunteers, and members. These interviews followed a simple snowball-sampling approach: beginning with outreach to individuals responsible for membership structures and progressing through campaigns, research, fundraising, and development teams. Snowball sampling is widely used in research on professionalized, networked organizations where formal access is constrained and internal dynamics are opaque. The semi-structured format allowed for consistent questioning tied to the theoretical expectations of the cartel NGO model while preserving flexibility to probe unanticipated themes. Over the course of 18 months in 2023 and 2024, I completed more than 30 such interviews.

This approach also comes with limitations that bear directly on how the evidence should be interpreted. Interviews with current or former staff may be affected by positionality, institutional loyalty, frustration, or strategic selectivity in what respondents choose to disclose. Some interviewees inside the organization may understate internal tension to protect colleagues or organizational reputation, while others — such as volunteers who have grown disaffected by

Amnesty's internal practices over time — may overstate dysfunction based on individual grievances. To mitigate these risks, I attempt to corroborate interview claims across multiple respondents and cross-check them against documentary evidence wherever possible.

A mixed-method design is particularly well suited to this project because Amnesty represents a theory-generative case: its long institutional arc, its unusually transparent public footprint, and the availability of insiders willing to speak about organizational evolution present an opportunity to identify mechanisms that existing theories do not fully capture. Public documents reveal how Amnesty narrates itself; internal materials reveal how it actually operates; interviews provide insight into the interpretive frames and strategic logics of those working inside the organization. The analysis of these data can thus form a detailed narrative of Amnesty's evolution — and allow us to test the theoretical expectations of the cartel NGO concept. What dynamics may we expect to see of an NGO in the process of cartelization? I propose seven main expectations, corresponding to the theoretical framework set out in the previous section.

Membership: Amnesty should shift from a *thick* model of membership to a *thin* one. Where the cadre NGO calls on extensive personal commitments from members highly identified to the organization, its principles, and its practice, the evolution of Amnesty should see the increasing disconnection from those members and the global civil society in which they once organized. Insofar as Amnesty continues to count a global “movement” of 10 million members, we can trace the emergence of the cartel NGO through the internal relationships that the organization structures to that movement and its participation in its activities.

Structure: Amnesty should shift from a *grassroots* structure to a *professionalized* one. If the cadre NGO once called on members of its own constituency to guide its decision-making processes and legitimate its practices, the cartel NGO calls on credentialed staff to do so on the basis of their expertise and training. Amnesty should see a growing gap between its local chapters, its identified constituencies, and the personnel tasked with managing the relationships between them.

Financing: Amnesty should see a shift from *personal*, small-scale contributions committed by cadre members to *impersonal*, large-scale contributions sourced with advanced data tools to attract them. The maturation of the NGO ecosystem has seen the third sector assume growing

responsibilities and amass growing budgets to manage them. Amnesty's model of financing should show a similar shift from one that relies on small-scale contributions out of the pockets of its core group of members to one relies on technologies imported from the corporate sector to track, trace, segment, and curate Amnesty's brand to bring in major donors. Most importantly for the cartel thesis, we should see Amnesty collaborating with other major NGOs — and only other major NGOs — to build the data profiles of these critical donors.

Agenda: Amnesty should shift from a *delimited* agenda organized around contentious targets to a *comprehensive* agenda that is moderated by the institutions it seeks to influence. Rather than focusing on a specific community or issue area, we would expect to see a cartel NGO seek to maximize its access to key resources by multiplying the forums in which it claims to be present — and skewing its positions in those forums toward a perceived consensus. Amnesty should exhibit this twin dynamic of forum multiplication and programmatic convergence.

Campaigns: Amnesty should shift from *labor-intensive* methods organized through personal networks to *capital-intensive* ones aimed at the general public. The emergence of global civil society saw NGOs organize small but highly visible actions that required sustained time commitments of their core members, while the mass NGOs that succeeded them relied on large-scale mobilizations in order to flex their 'people power.' The cartel NGO, by contrast, relies on its comparatively vast set of resources to shift toward capital-intensive strategies that no longer rely on that power. We should see a similar transition in Amnesty's tactics with respect to their perceived mission.

Leadership: Amnesty should shift from an *organic* model of leadership to an *executive* one. Cadre NGOs often originate in social movements, with leadership grounded in and emerging from specific sites of contestation, such as environmental disasters or civil conflicts. Cartel NGOs, by contrast — reliant on credentials in order to gain access to key levers of power — centralize authority in closed, executive forms of leadership. Amnesty should exhibit a similar trend toward leadership derived less from proximity to the cause it promotes than to other NGOs in the credentialed cartel.

Legitimation: Amnesty should shift from a logic of *resistance* to one of *access*. Just as party systems shifted from dynamics of contention to containment, so NGOs have seen a shift from a mission of ‘globalized resistance’ to one of permanent institutional participation, as the logic of legitimation evolves according to their relationship to global civil society. Once disconnected from it, we should expect Amnesty to legitimate its activities on the basis of that access — even if it requires greater *discipline* over its members and greater *accommodation* to the actors they once sought to contest.

I turn now to examine these dynamics through the past and present of Amnesty International’s operations.

MEMBERSHIP

The data collected for this chapter suggest a drastic transformation in the internal dynamics of Amnesty International and the evolution of its conception of membership, in particular. In early years of Amnesty’s operations in the 1960s, the organization followed a clear *cadre* model of membership. In 1961, its founder, Peter Benenson – an English barrister and recent religious convert — issued an appeal to experts in his field to join him in a year-long ‘Appeal for Amnesty’ for the world’s politically targeted ‘Prisoners of Conscience.’ The conception of membership that came with this appeal, however, called far beyond a simple request for legal support. As Benenson wrote in an August 1961 letter: “To me the whole purpose of AMNESTY (using the movement in its broadest sense) is to re-kindle a fire in the minds of men. It is to give to him who feels cut off from God a sense of belonging to something much greater than himself” (Buchanan 2002, 593). This *religious* conception (an early administrator at Amnesty International thought considered Benenson an “evangelist with a divine spark” [Ibid. 597]) sat at the heart of Amnesty’s cadre development. Membership was considered to be a form of *conversion* to the cause, and converts were considered to form part of a new *movement*; as Amnesty first treasurer, Neville Vincent, once said about the early days of the organization’s development:

It was a new movement, a bit strange and mad on the face of it. And it was not always easy, if one was being honest, to know if one was doing good, I mean bearing in mind the amount of effort involved, the amount of money, the amount of time...[O]ne was imbued with more zeal because very often people came back who'd been let out of prison...and said, 'About those postcards of yours, they kept me alive in a time of darkness.' (see Rabben 2001).

As with the cadre party, the membership of Amnesty in this phase of its development was largely restricted to a small set of elite actors. Benenson, for his part, was a graduate of Eton and Oxford, and his 'Appeal' sought to speak primarily to professionals of a similar ilk (Hopgood 2011); one of its earliest volunteers, for example, was the Irish diplomat Sean MacBride, secretary-general of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) for nearly a decade of legal work in Geneva, where he agreed to act as a "liaison and an inside 'ear' for Amnesty" (Clark 2001, 7). But among that elite set of movement members, Benenson sought to instill a horizontal sense of identity and ownership over the project. In an early edition of the Amnesty 'Bulletin,' Benenson set out this vision of a restricted but highly identified membership: "This Bulletin belongs to the ever-growing membership of AMNESTY: we hope that they will feel that it belongs to them, and that they can use it – to express views and carry announcements – as they wish," he wrote (1963). That cadre identification helped to motivate Amnesty's members to work extensively on a volunteer basis. By 1966, 80 percent of Amnesty personnel leading its work on prisoners of conscience were volunteers. "It's hard to describe how tiny it was," one of its early volunteers Stefanie Grant, said (Clark 2001, 17). Over a decade later, the same ethos of vocational commitment prevailed across the membership. As one Amnesty staff member told me:

When I joined Amnesty UK back in 1979... I made this joke to the chair: at the time you could fit all the staff into the lift. We had six or seven staff, and large and active local groups. The preponderance of activism came from volunteers. (PP)

Over the coming two decades, however, the conception of membership transformed alongside the scale of Amnesty's operations. From a high concentration in the United Kingdom at the outset of Benenson's appeal, Amnesty established chapters across the world — with an increasing presence

across university campuses in countries like the United States, where student groups emerged and student coordinators were elected to lead them. On campus, we can see the evolving conception of membership, from one grounded in a set of elite legal credentials to a highly generalized, standardized set of criteria for which even students could qualify. This shift coincided with the broader development of the field of human rights; if “there really wasn’t such a thing as ‘human rights work’ at the time” of Amnesty’s founding (Clark 2001, 12), by the 1980s a new field had opened with increasing scale and salience in the emergent politics of global governance (Moyn 2018). The result was that Amnesty attracted members on the basis of a broader, general commitment to the human rights framework, rather than as specific converts to Amnesty’s vocational methodology. As Hopgood (2011, 77) writes:

The growing number of new members who joined Amnesty in the 1970s and 1980s were less interested in Amnesty as an organisation and more interested in how it could be used to achieve broader human rights goals. They joined Amnesty as activists within the wider human rights movement, instead of the other way around, seeking to work less on ‘traditional’ Amnesty issues and more on increasingly prominent thematic concerns, including women’s rights and sexuality rights.

Here, we can see the seeds of the catch-all NGO as they spread across Amnesty International. More specifically, the growth of the organization’s mass membership created twin pressures that would combine to drive it into a new catch-all phase. To one side, the growth of membership brought in volunteers with interests in issues that lay beyond the traditional mandate of the ‘Appeal for Amnesty’ and its focus on prisoners of conscience, spreading thinner into the new areas that motivated its activists. To the other, the growth of membership called on Amnesty to develop its professional staff and their capacities to support all the new activity of its members. “As volunteers, of course, we started to say: we need professional backup,” one interviewee told me. Another traced this transition over the course of their first decade as a volunteer:

The function of the staff was originally to service the members. You had to have staff so members could do the work... Gradually, the staff starts to want to do more – not just facilitate work for the members, and gradually Amnesty not only wants to free individuals, but also to

take on the issue themselves... If you asked staff now, they would say their role is not only to recruit members, but largely tell them what to do... It's a staff-run organization, with members diminishing in number, the local groups diminishing in number. (BS)

Over the course of this transition, the increasingly central role of Amnesty's staff as the guiding authority of its operations radically shifted again the meaning of organizational membership. Members, once considered the beating heart of the organization and its 'movement,' were increasingly sidelined in the operations of the organization (see *Structure*) — even as Amnesty continued to legitimate its role in global governance through reference to its 'millions-strong' movement (see *Legitimation*). Meanwhile, however, the organization was maturing along with the broader ecosystem of NGOs, with increasingly defined relationships to global governance institutions and decreasing relevance of the original letter-writing tactics around which it once organized — and through which it once forged committed cadre. As one former Amnesty staff member said: "Today, members are just donors. There is no movement to speak of... That's the 'modern advocate movement,' as I call it, because not everyone is activist, because not everyone is active" (BC). The staff member cited the emergence of new technology platforms like *moveon.org* that have succeeded — in this final phase of cartelization — to thin the concept of membership into irrelevance.

Moveon.org changed everything, because a donation or a signature turns you into a member. Armchair activism has become the model for most of these organizations. People do not see how they can be involved in the work. For some organizations that has been deliberate; they see it as helpful for a 'professional' organization that does not have to rely on the grassroots... Folks see less of a need to have their boots on the ground. (BC)

In his sweeping study of Amnesty over the course of over fifty years of its development, Stephen Hopgood (2011) provides a smoking gun for the cartelization thesis with respect to this first dimension, by documenting the paradox of Amnesty growing base of members — even as the 'movement' it once willed into existence faded out.

By the 1990s a decline in active members went hand in hand with membership growth as a whole. The figures for 1983, for example, listed total membership at 571,439 with active membership at 217,259. The figures for 1993, just ten years later, estimated total membership at 900,000 and active membership at 150,000, in other words a drop from just under 40 percent of members active in 1983 to just 16 percent in 1993... By the 1990s, Benenson's hope for a new kind of community spirit was all but gone even as the organization he founded thrived. (49).

By two decades later, "the local groups have been decimated," said a board member of Amnesty USA (RL). "Amnesty USA pulls a ton of money. But members have no funding... We do not have support." She continued:

Amnesty considers anyone who donates to be a member... The problem is that, on a global level, it made it look like our organization was this massive organization with all these activists... Eventually we acquiesced to talking about 'active members' versus membership. To distinguish those donors from activists, we have the concept of the 'member-leader.' But even within member-leaders, there are tiers. You're seeing over the past decade decreasing investment in local groups; local groups used to be the vibrant part of Amnesty, but they are closing left and right.

Through such an analysis of Amnesty's membership dynamics, then, we can see the coevolution of NGOs' internal practices in relation to the broader development of global civil society. In the early days of the cadre NGO, organizations like Amnesty were forced to draw capacity from the small community of like-minded activists who — by dint of their elite education or occupational training — developed a global consciousness around which the transnational work of the organization forged its cadre. Over time, though, global civil society not only expanded from the small circles of such pioneering transnational advocates, but also enjoyed the fruits of technological developments that could facilitate their sustained dialogue. The expectation of scholars that theorized the dynamics of global civil society in its primordial era may have been that those technologies would strengthen the capacities for collective action through NGOs like Amnesty. The data presented in this section, however, suggest the very opposite — that these

technological innovations encouraged NGOs to detach themselves from global civil society completely in service of a more centralized structure of operations, reducing mass participation to clicks, petitions, and donations on their new digital platforms.

STRUCTURE

The above section marshalled original data to trace the evolution of Amnesty's membership practices in order to shed light on the dynamics of NGO cartelization. That analysis yielded a counterintuitive finding: the development of global civil society has not necessarily strengthened NGO's grounding in — or relationship to — its grassroots membership; on the contrary, organizations like Amnesty have simultaneously expanded the membership of their “movement” in keeping with the growth of global civil society, while transforming their membership practices in ways that undermine their standing as an organic “movement.” In this section, I further development that argument with reference to the broader structure of Amnesty's operations. Drawing from the same set of data, I point to a similar double movement in the organization's internal dynamics: even as the organization grew and “deconcentrated” (Rodley 2011) away from its original London base, it simultaneously *re*-concentrated its operations by increasing the authority of its staff and its executive teams, in particular, creating a highly stratified mode of operation that stands in stark contrast to the grassroots and deliberative methods associated with the cadre NGO that once emerged in the early phases of global civil society's development.

The early days of Amnesty's operations match the description of the cadre NGO and its grassroots mode of self-organization. Following the publication of Benenson's initial appeal, a small number of personally committed and politically connected individuals gathered in Luxembourg and later in Belgium for conferences in which the name, structure, and articles of operation of the ‘International Movement for Freedom of Opinion and Religion’ were debated. As with the cadre party, Amnesty's operations then were a ‘scale-free network’ (Wong 2008), defined by “ease of joining and preferential attachment” to its founding members. “The network had not yet evolved

into the distributed, specialized bureaucracy it would after Benenson's departure. And yet, people joined Amnesty...rather than darting off with the information Amnesty provided and starting their own advocacy organization" (104). The grassroots nature of that network is visible in the personal connections that drew members to the movement and sustained its small-scale operations. In the 1960s, the workers who staffed Amnesty did so on the basis that it "chimed with their own experiences of persecution and loss" (Buchanan 2002, 590), many of them Jews who had fled Nazi Germany. Wong (2008), in his own work on Amnesty's early internal operations, shows this 'scale-free network' and the highly personal connections that sustained its core operations.

From the early days of this highly personalized network of cadre operations, Amnesty expanded rapidly — and a new structure was designed to facilitate that shift from a cadre structure to one that could support a mass base of members. By the late 1970s, the International Secretariat had grown to employ over 100 members on its staff, which supported the advocacy efforts of a ballooning regional membership: from 15,000 members in 30 countries in 1969 to 200,000 in nearly 100 countries one decade later (Wong 2008).

By 1977, the IS employed 110 staff members, compared to the early days when the number of paid staff could be counted on one hand. Importantly for Amnesty as a network, the bureaucratization of central power did not result in the loss of the advantages of utilizing membership-based advocacy. In fact, the reorganization of power within the network resulted in the growth of the membership, from 15,000 members in 30 countries in 1969 to 200,000 in approximately 100 countries in 1979,102 with continued, undisrupted expansion until the 1980s. The transition to a mass NGO saw Amnesty shift from the highly personalized methods of its early operations — with Benenson himself directing operations in accordance with the "remarkable charisma and energy" (Buchanan 2002, 587) that kept him at the central node of the early network (Figure 4.2) — to standardized ones that be transmitted and applied to new chapters sprouting up across the world. The International Secretariat, tasked with managing the growth of this mass NGO, experienced a process of thorough bureaucratization that ran against the grassroots spirit of the early days of cadre-based Amnesty.

In his account of a half-century of Amnesty's development, Stephen Hopgood (2011) describes the dialectical tension between NGO growth and bureaucratization:

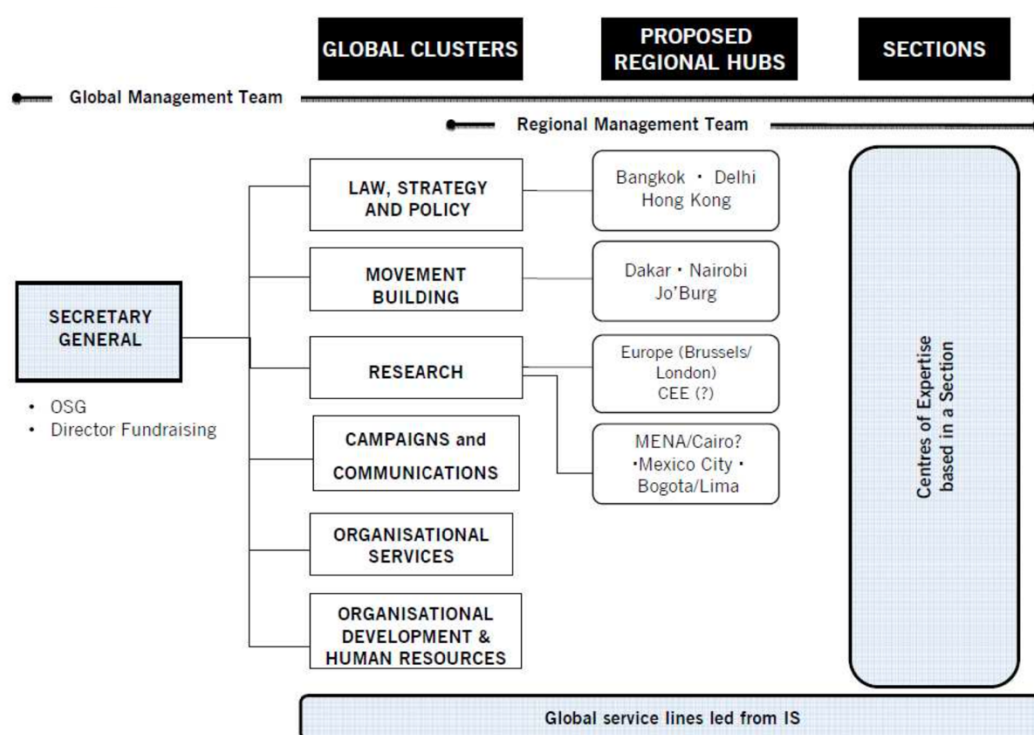
As activists who were personally and professionally interested in rights before joining Amnesty, they created some anxiety about a loss of organizational identity among those whose primary loyalty remained to Amnesty's vision of rights...The group-based, volunteer spirit that was critical for Amnesty's sense of its specialness could not sustain a global research organization... Sustaining a global campaigning mission and the attachment to POCs meant more money and more members which in turn meant more opportunities to hire professionals to manage the complex organization, raise substantial income, market Amnesty globally and handle logistics. (89)

That "anxiety" translated into significant tensions inside the organization — in particular, *between* the new branches that were gaining strength in new regional networks and the bureaucratic International Secretariat back in London. As early as 1979, the Executive Director of Amnesty International USA was writing to Secretary General Martin Ennals to complain of centralization of authority in the IS to select the 'Prisoners of Conscience' on behalf of national chapters and to refuse to explain the logic of those decisions (Wong 2008). By the early 1990s, the tensions between expansion and centralization had reached such a pitch that the Secretary General resigned in "frustration at the refusal of Amnesty's senior voluntary leadership to fully support its permanent professional staff" (Hopgood 2011, 90), citing a "lack of realism" in the broader movement about what the International Secretariat could do to support its members. By that time, Amnesty's membership was approaching one million members.

It is these pressures that drove a further transition in the structure of Amnesty's operations between the mass and catch-all phases of its development. Seeking to "deconcentrate" the organization out of the headquarters of its International Secretariat, General Secretary Salil Shetty moved 100 posts to new regional hubs across the world under the banner of 'Making Amnesty International a truly global movement for human rights.' That shift, too, can only be understood in the context of the broader evolution of global civil society and the ecosystem of NGOs; in his 2011 memo, Shetty noted the increasing reach of communications technology — "mobile phones, YouTube,

Facebook, Twitter, citizen journalism and mainstream media, particularly TV” — that would enable the organization finally to reach global scale. The new “Global Model,” as modeled in Figure 17, sought to move Amnesty “closer to the ground,” with a new Transition Management Team appointed to oversee the construction of its new regional hubs, monitoring their progress with new metrics such as speed, scope, and “improved quantity and quality of research outputs.”

FIGURE 17: AMNESTY’S “GLOBAL MODEL” (2011)



In the process, however, this process created new forms of stratification *inside* Amnesty’s chapters, even as it sought to reduce the tensions *between* the chapters. This, too, can be understood as a function of the broader development of the field of human rights. By time of Amnesty “global” transition, a new class of professionals had graduated from relevant management and governance programs in the field, and worked in a range of multilateral and human rights organizations. As one interviewee (BS) said of Amnesty’s USA chapter: “Soon we were getting people who were

professionalized, people who were at Greenpeace before, then the United Nations the next, then UNICEF after that. It's just a game of musical chairs." Already in the 1990s, new concerns had emerged about pay stratification in the organization, with wages frozen for lower-level staff and increased for its senior management (Hopgood 2011). By the 2000s, Amnesty members were concerned that senior management not only monopolized resources, but also the authority to manage operations without their participation.

In other words, Amnesty's transition to the cartel NGO may have *de*-concentrated its operations at global scale, but it also *re*-concentrated them in the hands of its chapter-level professional staff. Regional offices began to "fade away," as one interviewee (NG) said: "Amnesty used to have five regions across the US, with field organizers, deputy regional directors... But who sets the agenda? There would be situations when staff just unilaterally decides what that agenda is, and we would think: this is supposed to be a partnership." Another (TS) said:

The big shift in the model is that 30 years ago, it was: Take a case, let's train you up, and you as the grassroots would have people who want to work on India, you could take the case and work on it. It was a distributed approach... But independence is not useful for staff that are running campaigns. They want members to do what we tell them to do. Our staff looks at our local groups as an 'infection' to place a bubble around.

By way of illustration, another interviewee (RL) cited the promotion of the Amnesty USA attorney to its executive team, "so the attorney was no longer someone who was brought in on a case-by-case basis, but someone who weighs in on every strategic decision, who is everywhere, whose job it is to say 'That is going to be problematic.'" These are the "huge shifts" that have come with Amnesty's increasing cartelization. Where the organization was once fueled by the personal commitments of its grassroots members — connected to each in social networks grounded in shared experiences of "persecution and loss" — today it is directed by the professionals on payroll who deploy their credentials to protect the organization from the same grassroots energies that once powered it.

FINANCING

How does Amnesty finance its operations? How have its financing operations evolved over time? And what can that transformation tell us about the role of NGOs in global civil society and the politics of globalization writ large? For decades, Amnesty has presented a consistent message about the sources of its finances and the strategic thinking behind them: the “vast majority” of the organization’s income, according to its website, comes from “small donations from individuals,” protecting its “core principles of impartiality, independence, and accuracy” (Amnesty International, 2025). While many other organizations may have lost their core identity in the “NGO scramble” (Ron and Cooley 2002) — pursuing government grants and corporate sponsorships that skew its operations away from its stated mission — Amnesty’s development strategy has long promised to militate against such mission creep by grounding the organization in its “global movement” (Ibid). Amnesty thus presents a critical case for the cartel NGO and its theoretical expectations of underlying transformations in the organizational form and function of non-governmental organizations.

The data presented in this section seek to trace the historical transformation that hides behind Amnesty’s consistent message regarding its finances. Specifically, the interviews conducted for this study suggest that Amnesty’s development strategy can be divided into distinct phases that closely match its overarching shift from *cadre* to *cartel* NGO. Where the organization once relied on the personal contributions of individual activists — in cash, but more often through their donated labor, in kind — Amnesty then developed a mass fundraising machine that sought to appeal to a homogenous global membership for its financial support, facilitated by the development of digital technologies that allowed for fast and easy transmission of money over the internet. Recent years, however, have seen the hypertrophic development of that fundraising machine, and the digital technologies that fuel it. The result, I will show, is not only that Amnesty today caters to individual tastes and preferences for the *passive* recipients of the fundraising appeals that it sends based on detailed profiles of their digital footprints — evidence of *catch-all* NGO behavior. It is also that Amnesty *colludes* with the other large NGOs in its field to identify, exchange, and extract resources from the top ‘potential’ donors identified by its digital algorithms — while excluding smaller NGOs, without access to such expensive third-party functions, from

those data. The covert evolution of Amnesty's financing practices thus speaks directly to the puzzle outlined at the outset of this chapter, shedding light on how the free market "scramble" for resources became structured into the shape of an oligopoly that has restricted the dynamism of the NGO field at large.

Six decades ago, Amnesty's financing strategy was defined not by opportunity, but by need. Born from a moral appeal, the organization called on like-minded cadre concerned by the cause of human rights to join up and contribute their time to research and letter-writing on behalf of Prisoners of Conscience (PoC). As one Amnesty official described the in-kind contributions of its cadre: "We'll throw at it whatever it takes, whether that be people hours, because we know we have the support of people to work around the clock, or whether that be financial cost and we just cut back on something else" (Hopgood 2011, 37). The organization thus adopted what it called the "Volunteer Spirit" and considered itself a "volunteer movement" of "dedicated individuals freely giving their time and energy to the cause of human rights worldwide."

The International Secretariat too began as a volunteer operation, and has always relied on unpaid volunteers in many areas of its work, as well as the dedication of its staff. Two of the very earliest volunteers at the International Secretariat were Rhyl Andrews and Colin Leyland-Naylor. Both came in regularly to read, cut and paste newspaper articles. From the earliest days of Amnesty International right up until it was no longer possible for either of them to come to work because of failing health, their contribution was essential to the life-saving work of the movement. In their own distinctive ways, both expressed extraordinary courage, determination and humour in the face of personal adversity—and enduring commitment to the principles for which Amnesty International stands. Quietly and persistently they exemplified the qualities of character and service that built Amnesty International and preserved in it the ability to value and defend the human spirit (Excerpt from Amnesty Library, Ibid, 8).

The examples of Andrews and Leyland-Naylor thus established a paradigm for Amnesty's cadre phase of financing through individual effort, even at tremendous personal cost. Even as Amnesty

began to attract donations through its burgeoning network of allies, its principal request for resources came in the form of volunteer hours from the cadre organized in its local chapters.

The shift to a mass NGO marked a sea change in these financing operations. Unlike many of its peers, Amnesty strove to maintain a strict position of independence from the governments it lobbied. Back in 1967, Amnesty suffered an international scandal, as evidence of its close ties to US and British intelligence was revealed to the public at large (Srivastava 2022). In the years that followed, then, Amnesty applied additional effort to presenting an image of its impartiality. Even as the development of the NGO field opened new opportunities for government funding — with governments seeking to legitimate their operations through civil society participation (Ossewaarde et al. 20008) and plug holes in their service provision through NGO operations — Amnesty pursued a grassroots model of financing that avoided overt government grants. One founder of Amnesty described its commitment to independence as “working for people, not ideologies or anything else, and it was people who were going to work for them” (Hopgood 2011, 120). To facilitate that people-based model of financing, Amnesty not only opened its ranks to mass membership across the world, but also adopted techniques like direct mail to request their financial support — with tremendous success. In 1967, the International Secretariat relied on a budget of just £2781; ten years later, that budget had risen to £500,000, while the number of local groups ballooned to 1,817.

The arrival of digital technologies facilitated both the expansion of Amnesty’s membership and its capacity for individual fundraising. The advent and adoption of the internet meant that Amnesty was now able, alongside its direct mail, to attract potential donors at scale and low cost to engage with its mission and consider a small donation to support its operations. The financing strategy, in the shift to the mass NGO, followed the “corporate trend,” one Amnesty official told me, “toward access and ease of payment, creating ways to incorporate philanthropy as they would incorporate any other way of shopping online” (BC). Amnesty activists, in this phase, thus became consumers, perceived by development officers as a homogeneous field of potential donors to sustain its mission of independent and impartial human rights advocacy. New digital tools like moveon.org — which sought to organize global civil society through petitions and crowdfunding mechanisms — “changed everything, because a donation or a signature turns you into a member,” said one

Amnesty staff member (BC). Internally, Amnesty introduced more specific designations between “membership”, “active members,” and “member-leaders” in order to “distinguish donors from activists” (RL). But overall, “in Amnesty lexicon, there is no distinction today between a member and a donor” (BS). Even in its direct mail, donors became identified to their ‘source code,’ a unique personal ID and a special “RFM” code — standing for “Recency, Frequency, Monetary” to refer to when you give, how often you give, and how much you give — that allowed the organization to test its methods like paperweight and envelope messaging in order to maximize fundraising appeal to the general public.

Over time, however, digital technologies matured — alongside their mass adoption and the corporate schemes to draw profit from them. Through the course of the ‘data revolution’ (Kitchin 2014), individual internet users not only developed vast and detailed footprints, but private companies were also able to track them across platforms. Here, we can trace Amnesty shift from a mass NGO to a catch-all one, as its development practices shifted away from tools like moveon.org that considered users as a homogeneous mass to bespoke digital targeting methods that could craft messages that catered to the specific interests of individual users, or latent ‘activists,’ as Amnesty saw them. Rather than rely on a standardized appeal and a strict mandate, Amnesty began to “segment” its membership — and the general public beyond it — according to the specific causes. As one development officer described it:

It’s highly segmented: We try to keep you engaged on the issues you donated to. We do a lot of big data analysis to guarantee that we are giving back to people what they want to hear from us... We are making a lot of institutional changes to accommodate the fragmentation of different issues: I am here for gun rights, I am here for climate, I am here for gender. We want to be able to curate Amnesty so that this content is reaching you. (BC)

The shift to this ‘curatorial’ approach thus marked a radical inversion of the original Amnesty model: instead of activists flocking to the organization in a “volunteer moment” or as a religious calling, Amnesty is reaching out to the general public to attract their financial support. Here, as in other sections of this case study, we can see a double movement at work. On the one hand, the curatorial approach is a *democratization* of Amnesty’s operations, flexibilizing its once-rigid

mandate to correspond to the particular interests of potential members. On the other, the segmentation process allowed Amnesty to make subtle shifts away from a standardized mode of small individual payments to prioritize the larger donors that it was able to identify in its digital pool. According to the development officer:

You can identify high net-worth individuals on your database file, and you can use that information to target these people. You can write to them to say, ‘Hey, I see you are interested in this, let’s have a conversation’... It’s amazing because a lot of people will just drop \$5,000, and if you do that, then you will get a personal phone call, and from that call, you will find out a lot: did your aunt just die, or did you see a cause that really motivated you. (BC)

These became what O’Dwyer and Unerman (2008), in their study of Amnesty Ireland, refer to ‘extraordinary members’, citing another official on their particular value to the organization. “These are people who give their time, like for example artists, or significant influentials who give us their name, or people who give us large sums of money ... [Their] belief has to be restored or matched and recognised in terms of a sense of accountability owed to them” (25).

The maturation of digital technologies thus meant the structuring of the market for individual donors. While NGOs like Amnesty may have been engaged in a general “scramble” for resources, these new technologies allowed Amnesty — or, more specifically, the third-party companies contracted on its behalf — to develop a detailed picture of potential donors in the general public, and rank them according to their financial resources.

There is publicly available information all over the place — Wealth Engine, LexisNexis — that essentially are public records aggregators, and if you have someone’s name and address on-file, you can submit a name and it will give you a financial portfolio of what their personal income and wealth might look like, based on property records, charitable donations, publicly available political donations, and financial reporting like investment forms reporting. Do they own a boat? Do they own a helicopter? These companies collect all this information in proprietary and non-proprietary ways — you can go to Equifax, a credit rating agency, and

they will sell you this information... By the time you are getting into a gift portfolio, we know a lot about you. (BC)

Hand in hand with the shift away articulated in the previous section — away from *thick* membership and toward a *thin* one — Amnesty's attention thus turned toward the high-net worth individuals it could identify through the contracted firms that helped to conduct this “wealth screening” process.

Yet this model also proved an unstable configuration. As global civil society matured alongside these digital technologies, so the norms and expectations around philanthropy evolved around them. The explosion of NGOs in the field of human rights meant greater competition for the attention of private donors on whom Amnesty relied for the vast majority of its financing. Meanwhile, shifts between generations implied shifts in the expectations of potential donors.

Amnesty used to be writing letters to PoCs, letters to Members of Congress, but there wasn't an expectation that Amnesty reflect those values back. There was an ingrained level of trust with the Baby Boomers, but less and less as you go down. There is no longer a degree of trust with the new generation. The value landscape has changed so much, and Gen Z is much less loyal. (BC)

The result of this intensified competition for resources — in a crowded field of NGOs with disloyal donors in the public at large — has been to increase the cost of “acquisition.” The scramble for resources, in this phase, has become highly concentrated, as the larger NGOs chase after the same set of identifiable and identified potential donors. Acquisition, for these NGOs, is always “loss-leading,” meaning that the money spent to attract and identify new potential donors is highly cost-intensive, while the path to “profitability” from their attention was estimated by one Amnesty official at 36 months, as the organization seeks to drive a potential donor from a one-off donation of \$5 to a monthly one of \$20 and onto a major gift in the “middle dollar segment” of \$1,000 or more. Amnesty's economic imperative has thus been to shorten the path to profitability while lowering the initial cost of acquisition. As the development officer told me: “When digital started, it was extremely cheap; but now when we talk about digital leads, they have become incredibly

expensive, to buy those leads. Part of that there is a lot more non-profits, and people are much more discerning about what they give their money to.”

It is this economic imperative that now drives the cartelization of NGOs like Amnesty. Confronted by intensified competition for a limited set of high-value donors, Amnesty has turned to companies known as “data coops” that create pools of valuable donors with detailed personal profiles, and allow their clients to share, trade, and purchase the contact information of those donors for an exorbitant fee.

Data coops are kind of like a credit rating agency. A bunch of non-profits will sign-up together. And everyone submits all of their names. And the coop creates a scoring system that assesses whom you have given to: they look at your causes, how much you give, and then generate a score based on how likely you are to give to a certain cause: a personality model of the people on there. And you can say you want 10,000 names of people based on their ‘affinity with Amnesty International.’ This is a better way to target so you can be more successful. The coop creates a shared risk pool, so not everyone is poaching all the time...There’s no other way to find new names. The other way is that you go onto a street corner and just ask for names. But the only real asset that a non-profit is their donor list; it’s the most important asset a non-profit has. (BC)

Here, we can see the dynamics of the cartel NGO in action, as the largest NGOs divvy up the pool of donors in a tacit agreement to avoid mutual ‘poaching.’ As the Amnesty official admits: “This can be cost-prohibitive for non-profits of a certain size. So when you talk about these data co-ops, you are talking about these non-profits of a certain size. *Not necessarily the best of the best, but definitely the biggest of the biggest*” (BC, emphasis mine).

A lot of people who care about the environment also care about human rights. We literally go to Greenpeace, and we say: We will give you 10,000 names from our list if you gave us 10,000 names from your list. There are companies out there that just do list-exchange management. There’s a system called ‘rate cards,’ and they say how many names they have available, how much they are paying on average, their zip codes. We look at those lists that

are available, and we can identify which areas we want, and we will list-exchange and then test the performance of that list, then that's a good list. And then we would go back for 50,000 names, not just 10,000 names.

The hypertrophic development of digital technologies — once hailed by scholars of globalization as a driver of transnational community (Castells 1999) and common resistance (Anheier et al. 2005) to capitalist dynamics — has thus given rise to the cartel NGO, which now correspond closely to the corporate model from which they once set themselves apart. As my interviewee (BC) put it: “Non-profits follow the corporate space. As the corporate space becomes saturated, these companies come to the non-profit sector to sell us their tools. And if you have the cash available, then non-profits can take advantage of those. We get the *corporate sloppy seconds*, and if you're ahead of other non-profits, you can beat out the competitors.”

Today, the algorithmic and ‘artificial intelligence’ revolutions are driving these dynamics even further, allowing NGOs to track and trace potential donors across their devices. One Amnesty official told me that to understand the future of NGO financing, one must look at the privacy policies on their websites — policies that increasingly allow NGOs, like corporations, to capture the big data that feeds into their donor profiling. “We have people who donated three years ago, and who have gone silent. But we have lots of information on them still, so as we look at those data, we can bring in an AI company and have them use an algorithm to find people on our file who *should* be engaged with us” (BC). The cartel NGO thus marks a final break with the global civil society in which it first emerged. No longer articulated through the common spirit of its “volunteer movement,” cartel NGOs like Amnesty both seek to cater to the individual profiles of potential donors, and to divide the spoils of those efforts between other organizations against which they once competed to provide the most compelling message. The predictable result, as Bush and Hadden (2019) have observed, is to crowd out the field of NGOs — while diminishing their respective commitments to the mission on which they were once founded.

AGENDA

What does Amnesty International do? If NGOs define themselves by the causes that they pursue, then what are the issues around which Amnesty organizes, how does it make sense of those issues, and how has that understanding evolved over time? Previous sections of this case study have traced the transformation of Amnesty's internal practices and their relationship to the broader field of human rights. In this section, I turn to the question of Amnesty's agenda and how — both on paper in practice — its members and its staff have pursued it.

Drawing on the data from my semi-structured interviews, I will advance the argument that, over the past half-century, Amnesty's agenda has moved in orthogonal directions. The first has seen Amnesty's work *broaden*: from a narrow “mandate” to liberate so-called Prisoners of Conscience, or PoCs— once fastidiously defined at Amnesty by persecution due to their ideas, religion, ethnicity, or social origin—the organization has shifted to a much broader “mission” to defend the full scope of human rights (from gender identity to Indigenous territory) and redress the root causes of their violations (such as climate change). This process of extensive and open-ended “forum multiplication” (Allen 2020) has seen Amnesty adopt a catch-all approach to its agenda in a very similar way that political parties shifted away from their own early programmatic convictions in the transformation of their party systems (Katz and Mair 1995) — initially, as a method to appeal to its mass membership, and later as a ploy to remain “relevant” in a rapidly changing field of human rights. The second direction, in this sense, has seen Amnesty's work *shallow*: from a thick set of criteria to guide its work, Amnesty's adoption of that extensive and open-ended agenda has spread the organization out in ways that both limit its effectiveness and undermine the democratic movement from which it once drew legitimacy.

By drawing attention to this contradictory double movement — both toward greater representative democracy in its agenda and less substantive democracy in its efforts to deliver it — this section aims to develop the theory of the cartel NGO not as a conspiracy of its managers, but as a response to the broader dynamics of the new politics of globalization. As global civil society developed over time, so did the scope and intensity of its demands to be taken up by NGOs like the Amnesty. Paradoxically, however, the adoption of those new demands resulted in those organizations

becoming more centralized, more moderate, and less anchored in the movements out of which they were born. While the cartel NGO is capable of adaptation to new issues, it is thus always chasing behind the cadre NGOs pushing the boundaries of global civil conflict ahead of them.

In its early days, the Amnesty movement defined itself by a “mandate” — clearly defined and religiously respected. In 1961, its founder Peter Benenson had been moved by reports of the detention of two Portuguese students who had dared to raise a toast to liberty; as a response, Benenson had published an appeal for the students — along with similar “prisoners of conscience” — to be freed, and called on friends and allies to join him in pursuit of their freedom. By 1968, this pursuit had been codified in the form of Amnesty’s “Mandate”, a dense set of questions and criteria that — once again parroting the religious foundation of Amnesty’s early work — “was almost Jesuitical in its complexity” and the critical “source of researcher authority,” in the words of Hopgood (64). He quotes one ‘legendary researcher’ from his interviews:

Oh, the mandate was on our lips every moment of the day. And in fact, that was central to everything we did. I mean, as a researcher, I get a piece of information and my first question was: is it within the mandate? Before I even bothered to find out whether it was worth pursuing... The mandate was absolutely the most important thing in our lives... whether something was inside or outside the mandate was, you know, the big question. (63)

The fidelity to the Amnesty mandate in the early phase thus corresponds to its cadre phase of development, during which its core activities were bound together by a specific, articulated cause, anchored in a shared methodology that called on all of its members to engage deeply in every case and provide the rigorous research to prove its applicability as a PoC.

Through the 1980s, however, Amnesty grew rapidly — both as a cause and a consequence of the development of the field of human rights. Where Amnesty once “tended to dominate and even define human rights action internationally” (Grant 2011, 18) a broader set of NGOs emerged over the course of the decade to challenge that position of dominance and represent the broader scope of human rights defined by multilateral representatives such as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Here, Grant (2011) articulates an early version of Amnesty’s contradictory double movement: on the one hand, “the creation of a High Commission was itself a striking achievement

for Amnesty,” in establishing human rights as a paradigm in the multilateral system; on the other, the Commissioner’s expansion of their scope — to accord with the burgeoning popularity of that paradigm — forced Amnesty to revise the mandate on which it was founded. As Table 4.2 shows, Amnesty made successive tweaks to its founding mandate to keep up with the broadening scope of the human rights paradigm, even while insisting that its “present mandate should be made permanent,” as Secretary-General Thomas Hammarberg wrote in a memo in 1983. “It would be close to suicidal for AI to change or drop any of these basic principles in its work,” Hammerberg wrote. “The ambition should rather be to protect and safeguard them. This basic approach, however, should not prevent us from analyzing in depth the major choices we now confront relating to our mandate and policies.” The tweaked mandate reflects the competing pressures both to remain relevant in expansive field, and to protect the core attributes that sustained Amnesty as a field-leading organization.

Over time, Amnesty’s shift from a cadre to a mass NGO began to apply vertical cross-pressures to its founding mandate. The influx of new members to the Amnesty ‘movement’ applied *upward* pressure for the organization to adapt to the political priorities emerging democratically from its mass base. Those downward pressures had a geographic dimension; members in the Global South, for example, argued that Amnesty’s obsession with PoCs was evidence of a “Northern bias” (Goering 2006) that overlooked the importance of cultural and social rights for peoples in poor countries. And those downward pressures had a sectoral dimension, as well; new members challenged the criteria of the original mandate to call for increased attention to issues of sexual orientation, leading to the expansion of the mandate to include the criminalization of sexuality at the International Council meeting in Yokohama, Japan. By 1987, Amnesty had changed its founding motto from “one movement, one voice” to “one movement, one message, many voices” in order to present a more pluralistic mode of democratic organization. Yet the explosion of mass participation paradoxically entailed a simultaneous *downward* pressure to maintain the organization’s authority in the hands of the staff who could be trusted by the movement’s new strata of managers to protect the integrity of its mandate. While its public presentation offered a more pluralistic message of “many voices,” then, internal documents from the same period note that the organization’s growth “will necessitate a strict observance of AI principles and procedures in order to ensure that a single AI identity is preserved and that AI speaks with *one voice on all*

levels of the organization in all parts of the world, instead of with as *many different voices* as there are national sections” (Tesseur 2017, 14, emphasis mine). These cross-pressures were well captured by the Mandate Review Committee (MRC), founded in 1988 to resolve the tensions in Amnesty’s agenda-setting process. “Few are the mandate ‘experts’ in the movement and most of them are staff,” they wrote (MRC 1990). “In a democratic movement this should not be accepted, and the movement should find a way of involving section volunteers in meaningful ways in this process.”

TABLE 8: FORUM MULTIPLICATION AT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Year of expansion (location of International Council meeting)	Expansion of mandate
1973 (Vienna, Austria)	Death penalty
1974 (Askov, Denmark)	Fair trial
1979 (Leuven, Belgium)	Extrajudicial killings for political reasons
1983 (Jouy-en-Josas, France)	Ability to condemn torture and/or killing of prisoners by non-state actors
1985 (Helsinki, Finland)	Refugees
1987 (Aguas de Lindoia, Brazil)	All extrajudicial killings
1991 (Yokohama, Japan)	Sexual orientation, administrative detention, forced deportation, house destruction
1993 (Boston, USA)	Non-governmental prisoners of conscience
1995 (Ljubljana, Slovenia)	Unfair trials of political prisoners by non-state actors
1997 (Cape Town, South Africa)	Opposition to weapons of war & land mines in particular
1999 (Troia, Portugal)	No changes - A mandate review was in process during this meeting
2001 (Dakar, Senegal)	Move to full spectrum approach
2005 (Morelos, Mexico)	Mandate replaced with "mission"

The critical juncture in the trajectory of Amnesty’s agenda came at its meeting in Dakar, Senegal in 2001. There, at Amnesty’s celebration of 40 years, the organization adopted a new mandate that embraced the “full spectrum” of human rights — economic, social, and cultural. Far from the stringent mandate that once guided its cadre, Amnesty’s 2001 mission statement marked its transition to a *catch-all* NGO, with a “mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of

conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of promoting all human rights.” Once again, the shift from ‘first generation’ human rights to ‘second generation’ full-spectrum ones reflects the broader dynamic development of the field. As Amnesty’s report on “Defending human rights in a changing world” (2008) sets out,

Economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights are given the same emphasis in the UDHR as civil and political rights. However, these rights were in many ways a casualty of the Cold War; it was not until the early 1990s that recognition and understanding of ESC rights began to strengthen in response to action by grassroots activists and other civil society actors. Campaigns by social movements around the world drew attention to the drastic social impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes, to the effects of the crushing debt burden on developing countries’ capacity to satisfy the basic needs of the population, and to the deepening inequalities that many countries witnessed in the context of economic globalization. (20)

On the one hand, this juncture thus corresponded to the maturation of the field of human rights and the increasing inclusion of civil society in its definition. As one interviewee told me, “A major challenge Amnesty has faced is wanting more youth members to be engaged; there has been a sense that Amnesty should do more to focus on climate change as a human rights issue to win these people back... and one can make a similar argument around racial justice or LGBT rights” (NG). Amnesty’s shift toward this catch-all position — multiplying its fora to appeal to a new broader audience — came as much from without as from within; the development of global civil society meant the founding of new, smaller cadre NGOs dedicated to each of these positions. The result was that Amnesty was forced to compete for the attention and investment of new generations of activists attracted to these niche causes, and the shift from mandate to “mission” that came after its 2001 meeting seemed like a critical way to “to get more enthusiasm and energy from younger members” (NG).

On the other, the shift to a catch-all NGO has diluted the core identify around which Amnesty’s original cadre once organized. Hopgood (119) writes that that as of 2003, “in the words of an IS senior manager” that he interviewed, “No one could actually tell you (a) what is Amnesty’s core business and (b) what sections and structures are actually doing... no one in the movement could

actually tell you that.” My more recent interviews confirm the sense of perceived negative consequences of the mandate’s disappearance — despite its democratic origins.

If we are changing over time to becoming a climate-change, anti-gun violence, anti-racist, anti-a-lot-of-things, then we are going to drown and disappear in the midst of all the NGOs that have appeared with those issues in the last 10 years. There was a time when Amnesty was the only game in town... Now we sit in the plaza and it’s not noticeable to anyone. They would say ‘I thought Amnesty had ceased to exist. I don’t even know if there’s a chapter on campus.’ (HN)

The result of this process of forum multiplication is thus to expand the coverage of Amnesty’s agenda while limiting its potency. While Amnesty operates in a more competitive field of NGOs, it does so from a position of both size and prestige; these factors, interviewees told me, lead its managers to defend a more moderate position across the newer areas where there is less capacity and attention.

We have a habit of stepping on people’s toes. ‘Oh you’ve been working on maternal mortality for six years in Sierra Leone, who cares? We’ve got more money than you... Amnesty could be heavy-handed if the competitive organization was small enough... We have gone into things disregarding the locals, sometimes mucking up for about six months and then leaving again (BW).

Another said:

We have diffused too much to be effective. If you ask people what they think of Amnesty, they will have a favorable view, but if you ask them what we do, they will not have any idea. And that’s because Amnesty is not quite sure what it does. We have a terrible habit of forgetting to sunset our programs. We are a kid in a candy shop; we reach out to grab one thing and then see another and grab it. We will do something for six months and then we just leave. (BS)

These are the traits of a *cartel* NGO, trained to crowd the other organizations out of its field — even at the cost of its own effectiveness. Few today may know what exactly defines Amnesty’s agenda, but few can argue with its overwhelming power to set the agenda for the field at large. As one interviewee asked me: “There has been this temptation to say, ‘We have to jump on every human rights issue.’ Does Amnesty have anything to add to gun violence? Does it detract from work we are doing elsewhere? These are questions we stopped asking.”

CAMPAIGNS

The last section traced a contradictory double movement in the development of Amnesty International’s agenda over time — both *broadening* in the name of democratic representation to include a full spectrum of rights-based issues, and *shallowing* in the capacity and commitment to represent those issues toward a more centralized model of organizational governance. This section traces a similar dynamic through Amnesty’s campaign tactics. Specifically, it traces a shift in Amnesty’s campaigning practices from a *labor*-intensive set of tactics to a *capital*-intensive one, closely mirroring the shift documented by Katz and Mair (1995) in the party systems of advanced democracies. Just as in their theory of the twentieth-century political parties, Amnesty’s original model of campaigning relied heavily on the deployment of their core cadre’s individual labor to pursue its mission to protect the human rights of so-called ‘prisoners of conscience,’ through letter-writing campaigns and extensive coordination of local chapters. The arrival of digital technologies, however, transformed this campaign methodology — and drove the double movement traced in this chapter. In its transition to a mass NGO, Amnesty succeeded to deploy new communications tools like email, petitions, and digital advertising both to attract new allies and deploy their energies at global scale toward the organization’s campaign priorities. Over time, however — even as digital technologies reached a truly global audience — those same tools eroded the labor-intensive tactics that were once central to the Amnesty model, turning activists into mere ‘clicktivists’ — and later, in the organization’s shift toward its present cartel model, into fundraising vehicles for the operations of its professional staff. As one interviewee told me: “In

Amnesty lexicon, there is no distinction today between a *member* and a *donor*” (BS, emphasis mine).

Tracing the shift from labor- to capital-intensity thus supports the dynamic theory of the cartel NGO as it relates to the broader field of human rights and global civil society at large. Communications technologies were once hailed by scholars as a vehicle for the democratization of globalization (Castells 2001), not only forging transnational networks among previously disconnected communities (Anheier 2001) but also empowering them to challenge traditional powers and circumvent their authority with novel visions of alternative governance (Scholte 1999). The interviews and internal documents analyzed in this section, however, suggest a more complex and dynamic process than this linear trajectory they once theorized. Where digital technologies may have once decentralized power into the hands of global activists, it has since *re-centralized* in the hands of the professional staff tasked with developing resources for cartel NGOs and thus sustaining their survival. In the process, it has turned *active* members participating in the labor-intensive process of campaigning into mere *passive* recipients of digital communications that are today perceived as the primary site of political contestation for global civil society. The cartel NGO thus seeks to strengthen its “charity brand status” (Hankinson 2001) in order to acquire new voluntary donations; “transforming charity into brands allows donors to identify more precisely what the charity does and the values it represents. This in turn allows donors to identify and select those charities whose values most closely match their own” (Hankinson 2001: 1). As one Amnesty official told me, “We follow the corporate trend — toward access and ease of payment, creating ways to incorporate philanthropy as they would incorporate any other way of shopping online” (BC).

Sixty-five years ago, however, the conflation of commerce and activism would have seemed anathema at Amnesty. In its early cadre phase of development, the organization called on its loose community of committed individuals to dedicate their labor — free of compensation and unbound by professional role — to the pursuit of freedom for prisoners of conscience. As Stephen Hopgood documents in his history of Amnesty, early cadre relied on their “conscience” to complete the “painstaking, disturbing, unglamorous, unfeted work” of the organization (21). He cites an

interview conducted with the husband of one of the organization's earliest activists, Christel Marsh, who joined the organization shortly after the publication of its original appeal:

People don't realize but Christel spent not only an enormous length of time at the thing, but worked all through the night. I helped her with it. She would come home with piles of letters, drafting letters to people and causes and groups and who knows what else all over the world. She did most of the work at home because the conditions in the office, to begin with, were such that they were so crowded. It was funny, you could go downstairs, you could see down the steps of Mitre Court, down in the basement you'd see people writing letters on the floor, in one corner, all in little corners. It was an extraordinary situation.

As Amnesty's membership expanded through the first decade of its appeal, its labor-intensive campaigning tactics applied through its emergent chapters. According to one member who joined in 1971, the early days of Amnesty required that "you meet in person; it was a social gathering with your friends, or people of a similar mindset, whether a student group or a local group" (RH). Labor intensity was thus not only a *product* of Amnesty's early financial constraints, nor its limited access to advanced communications technologies. It was also a *producer* of the community that could sustain the commitments of its early cadre.

The birth of novel digital communication tools like email in the late twentieth-century marked a critical juncture in Amnesty's shift to a mass NGO. Where all earlier communication was conducted either in person or via 'snail' mail, these new tools allowed Amnesty to reach an even wider audience with an appeal to their conscience — and call them to organize through their local chapters. As one Amnesty member described back in 2003:

In terms of communication, coordination, and mobilization, e-mail has had a profound and largely beneficial impact on the internal workings of AI—more so than any other communications tool in the organization's history. Once access to e-mail is acquired, it provides a convenient and inexpensive alternative to the telephone, fax, and conventional mail. Contrary to a fax machine, e-mail can be used to contact members of a large mailing list simultaneously and reliably, without the cost of paper, which remains exorbitant in

many countries... In Canada, for example, members had long complained about feeling isolated from other members. They had complained of a lack of support and direction stemming from lack of access to key staff. E-mail has allowed Canadian members of AI, among others, to work more closely together in-country and transnationally. Members who share a particular thematic or geographic interest have been able to network, brainstorm, consult, plan, and mobilize without having to incur the costs and inconveniences of long-distance travel (Lebert 2003, 215).

Over time, however, these technologies began to erode the traditional communities on which Amnesty once relied for its labor-intensive model of campaigns. In particular, these technologies facilitated new forms of non-personal if highly curated forms of fundraising that turned activists into donors to Amnesty's core operations. Returning to the activist who joined in the early 1970s, my interviews revealed a sense of loss in the digitization of those operations, and dissolution of the chapter-based communities they once forged:

Technology certainly helped with the *cost* of the operation. But it became, over time, too comfortable to do this work. You can do it from your own home. Amnesty's local groups have dwindled. Everything is done via email. We do not meet here as a group in Dallas. Student groups have dwindled substantially in number. There is less seeming reason to meet in person. You do not see the human face to these issues. There is no campaigning *per se*. (RH)

The shift to a catch-all NGO thus implied the death of the traditional campaign, as Amnesty shifted to more capital-intensive means both to attract new 'members' and apply their labor through low-intensity mechanisms such as online petitions. Throughout my interviews, the phrase of "clicktivism" was frequently repeated to refer to this new mode of low-intensity activism that no longer relied on core cadre or their commitment to Amnesty's original mandate. "This no-time engagement with technology," writes Chouliaraki (2010, 117), "suggests that expectations of effortless immediacy, the most prominent element of contemporary consumer culture, are increasingly populating the moral imagination of humanitarianism." As a recent interview with Amnesty USA's social media manager suggests, the organization had adopted its status as 'super

brand' (Wootliff and Deri, 2001), with the capital-intensive practices incorporated directly from the corporate world:

Day-to-day, much of our work is similar to corporate brands. I'm just selling activism to audiences instead of lipstick or sneakers. The major difference in my work from my peers is that I have to teach people about a variety of complicated and nuanced issues before they want to take action.... Social media is really top of the funnel work to introduce our brand to new audiences who potentially could become members by signing a petition or donating. When we do this work, we are thinking about how to introduce people to our brand and our work, educate them on human rights issues and encourage activism on issues they care about. Alongside that work, we are also working to advance our campaigns. I work with campaigners to help design what our work looks like online and to find creative ways to encourage our membership and the public to take action to free people or to stop bad bills, for example (Digital World Marketing Forum, 2018).

Here, we can see many of the dynamics that define the cartel NGO and its capital-intensive form of campaigning. Amnesty's efforts in this phase are dedicated to what its development team call "acquisition," an expensive and "loss-leading" exercise dedicated to identifying potential new members and drawing them into Amnesty's campaigns. But the depth of the engagement offered to those new members has shallowed, while control over their contents has centralized in its staff and management. As another longtime Amnesty activist described:

You used to get members who were on their deathbed and said that getting someone out of prison was one of the best things they ever did in their life. The old Amnesty had that personal connection — you and the prisoner, you and the organization they were a part of... We never figured out how to use the internet effectively. We don't have any kind of personal connection now... So it comes down to the staff devising in a campaign, and all you can is participate. (BS)

That shift toward a cartel model of operations is visible in the pattern of Amnesty's development. Even as its base of resources has continued to grow over time, an increasingly large share is

dedicated to contracting digital consultants that manage these mass fundraising campaigns. In Amnesty USA's Form 990 from 2023, for example, the organization reports five separate multi-million-dollar payments to fundraising contractors, including \$4.9 million to Public Outreach Fundraising LLC, \$3.6 million to DV Canvass LLC, and \$3.5 million to AB Data. Combined, they total over 25 percent of Amnesty USA's total operational expenses. As one interviewee described the shift to capital intensity (EA): "It's round-the-clock fundraising at Amnesty. I see the organizational charts, and the single biggest department at Amnesty is development. This is reflected in the massive amounts of money spent on digital consultants."

But the consequences of this shift in Amnesty's campaign tactics reach far beyond the concentration of its decision-making powers or compensation practices. Rather, as was true of the cartel party, the shift to more capital-intensive methods has accompanied the broader creep away from the core mandate described in the previous chapter. Specifically, as one my interviewees detailed, while the deployment of new communications technologies has succeeded to secure the financial success and survival of the organization, it has scrambled its ability to assess its achievements relative to goals set out in its original appeal for clemency to prisoners of conscience.

I don't think there's been a constituent idea of Amnesty's goal. They want to 'count' how effective they are — is it number of clicks? Is it number of successes? Is it how much money you raise? There's not a clear message from the top. They make it up as they go along. When I first got involved, most of the work was writing letters on pieces of paper. You didn't have the internet. It was easier then to measure things. Now it's a question of retweets and clicks on an action on the website. In the past, there was a real focus on Amnesty groups maintaining relationships; the bread and butter was working on individual prisoner of conscience cases. The shift away from in-person, relationship-based toward a kind of clicktivism has gone hand in hand with the shift away from prisoner of conscience cases... Every time you click, you just get to a donations page. (EA)

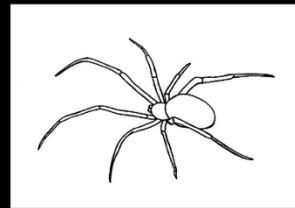
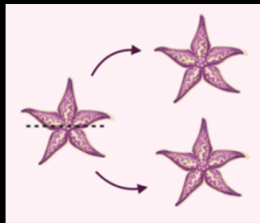
These shifting dynamics can be traced through the actual contest of Amnesty's practices, even up to the present day. Internal documents at Amnesty USA, for example, demonstrate a major conflict over the organization's "Organizing Model" through the Covid-19 pandemic. Those documents

reveal the pandemic as another critical juncture in Amnesty’s shift away from labor-intensive and local organizing toward a highly centralized, professionalized, and capital-intensive one. Specifically, as documented in Figure 18 and extended in the Appendix to this chapter, they show a conflict over a “snowflake” organizing model — developed through extensive consultation with members — and a new “distributed” organizing model that members complained had shut them out of Amnesty’s operations. “We, the undersigned member activists and volunteer leaders, believe AIUSA is in a profound and dangerous crisis of culture that threatens the identity, integrity and capacity of the section,” the members wrote to Amnesty USA’s Executive Director in November 2021. “If implemented, the Distributed Organizing Model will excise member activists from AIUSA organizing, without any meaningful input from members or accountability of the organization’s current shortcomings.”

FIGURE 18: MEMBER COMPLAINTS REGARDING “ORGANIZING MODEL” (2021)

3. Model is unidirectional

- 2013 model as a “starfish” (decentralized, Stakeholder lens)
- 2021 model is a “spider” (centralized, top-down, utilitarian lens)



Brafman and Beckstrom, 2006



In sum..

The 2021 Model proposes a structure that:

- Is designed to compete with existing groups
- Is better resourced than the activist membership
- Nearly depletes activist membership of its last staff support resources
- Diverts youth away from local groups
- Defines its success via (pilot) project metrics instead of human rights change

The 2021 Model as designed threatens our current local organizing structures, and seems designed to replace them



These complaints were further elaborated in the interviews for this chapter. As one member told me:

During Covid, senior leadership basically said — without consulting us — We don't need office space anymore, let's close these down and try this new organizing model... They tried to do everything virtually — and realized they could save a lot of money by going virtual, and there were staff who wanted to work at the 'cutting edge'. So they went to the hot thing, gun violence — which is very far from the original Amnesty mission. So the push for hot button issues like gun violence went hand in hand with this 'distributed' organizing model. The goal was to bring people in through online ads — different than organizers going out to support local groups and organize students. (TS)

Here, we can see how the dimensions of the cartel NGO detailed in this chapter fit together. In particular, we can see how the dynamics of forum multiplication set out in the previous section are functionally tied to the increasing capital-intensity of Amnesty's campaign tactics and the broader dissolution of its founding membership practices. Together, they point toward a new model of NGO governance that bears little resemblance to the vocation-based community that Amnesty's founder envisaged seven decades ago. Rather, it suggests a model geared toward resource dominance and the survival of the organization — even at the cost of its core mission and the members on which its legitimacy once relied.

LEADERSHIP

Who holds authority at Amnesty? How have the practices of staffing and leadership that bestow Amnesty's authority evolved over time? And how have these changes co-evolved with the broader environment of NGOs over the past half-century? This section deploys original data from my interviews with Amnesty officials and members to help these questions. The data suggest an ongoing transformation in the leadership practices inside the organization — and how those internal practices relate to Amnesty's external environment. Specifically, this section traces the transformation in modes of leadership at Amnesty. At its birth as a cadre NGO, an organic mode of leadership had individual activists assume responsibilities according to their personal investment in the mandate. This began to radically shift with increasing professionalization of its leadership practices, motivated by the financial opportunities and competition risks associated with the maturation of both the field of human rights and other NGOs developing to advance its agenda. The present process of cartelization has driven it further, with a revolving-door dynamic in the organization that places heavy emphasis (as we saw in previous sections) on the organization's executive leadership, itself imported from an increasingly narrow pool of non-profit leaders, and supported by head-hunting firms that aim to confer prestige and instill confidence in the direction of the organization among Amnesty's donors. Leadership practices at Amnesty, in this sense, have come to resemble those of the corporate sector from which non-profits once distinguished themselves in the cadre form: rather than emerging from the "movement," executive leadership is selected according to criteria that focus on large-scale organizational management and donor relations — with compensation packages designed to compete with the largest players in the field.

In the early days of Amnesty's development, the very concept of leadership appeared anathema to the spirit of the "movement." Even its formal founder Benenson — who came to assume tremendous authority on the basis of his personal charisma and commitment to the cause — articulated a philosophy of management in which leadership was collective, and its structure flat. "Those who support the Amnesty movement in its efforts to secure the release of prisoners are not generally concerned with points of order, and all the formality of stuffy meetings" (Amnesty *Bulletin*, no. 2, May 1963, as quoted in Hopgood 2011). There were no formal interviews for positions, but rather "anybody with good will was taken on," according to one of the early members

of the Amnesty Research Department (Ibid. 66). Leadership was assumed by those who were willing to assume it: “If you’d got a contribution [to make], you could make it... There was no sense of a hierarchy and a structure and authority, and all those things. Just a job to be done. That’s what we were there to do,” said volunteer Keith Siviter (Ibid, 67). Hopgood cites Louis Blom-Cooper on this early organic culture in which “amateurism” was considered Amnesty’s virtue:

I mean when . . . there were just a handful of people who were doing splendid work. But very disorganized in a way, and very under-funded. In a sense I like the idea of operating within a system whereby the people involved have a commitment, a personal commitment, in which you are not paid for what you do and everything is done in a fairly sort of non-professional way, I mean in a sense one becomes fairly professional simply by force of circumstances. (67)

Over time, however, that virtue became a vice. Amnesty was not only growing in size and scale; it was also growing in political influence. Even as its volunteers developed their professional capacities organically, so they began to call out for additional, external support to ensure the organization’s ability to respond to increasing demand for its services. “When I joined Amnesty UK... you could fit all the staff into the lift,” one early volunteer told me. “We had six or seven staff, and large and active local groups. The preponderance of activism came from volunteers. But of course, volunteers start to say: we need professional backup.” In that London office, Benenson himself had a change of heart. According to Peggy Crane, who came on board as the organization’s first executive officer, “everywhere [there were] masses of people coming in and out, everywhere congestion. And [Benenson] said we should perhaps try to make some executive sense [of it]” (Hopgood 2011, 67).

That sense first came in the form of a distinction between different areas, functions, and associated authority inside the organization. If the early days of the organization were defined by the ethos of ‘everyone does everything’ — “including the telephonists,” as Siviter said (Ibid., 63) — the formation of the International Secretariat created the structure that would allow the organization to grow into a mass NGO operating at global scale. There were “field operations” carried out by national chapters, and there was a “Central Office” that was endowed with the authority to delegate tasks and censor the broader membership where necessary. While representing a drastic departure

from the organic mode of its cadre phase of development, the leadership of the organization saw this shift as essential to the preservation of Amnesty's identity as it grew into the broadening space of global civil society. "We have a strikingly centralized approach on who can say what for AI. There are good reasons for this," said Secretary General Thomas Hammerberg in a 1983 internal memo. "The one voice principle is not only important, it is essential."

The push for professionalization in the Amnesty leadership thus came from both inside and outside the organization. Inside of it, staff members grew increasingly frustrated by the absence of an articulated structure that could effectively delegate tasks and manage the funds that Amnesty began to attract as it developed out of London into an international organization. Secretary General Martin Ennals, for example, who oversaw the large-scale expansion of the organization in the 1970s, became extremely concerned that the organization's messy operations would lead to legal infractions that would be identified by tax auditors reviewing their expenditures. That anxiety came with the increased external pressure on the organization, which not only suffered scandals relating to potential CIA infiltration of its operations (Srivastava 2022), but also because the increasing visibility of the organization in cases of Prisoners of Conscience (PoCs) meant greater scrutiny of its operations and the origins of its finances. The growth of the organization, several interviewees insisted, created both the opportunity and the burden of professionalization. By the 1990s, for example, "there's a huge of money from estates, and that's when we professionalize" (HL); "some of its stems from pressure from above to hold NGOs more accountable, but a lot of it has to do with the corporatization of NGOs, making them more accountable to their donors" (RL).

Such a shift to the catch-all style of leadership — credentialized, professionalized, and bureaucratized — was not without internal tensions, in line with those sketched out in previous sections. On the one hand, long-standing volunteers in the membership complained that that the changes to the leadership left them "lost in a cosmos of 'organigrams'", disconnected from the top brass of an organization described as people with a "Stanford MBA and a six-figure salary" (Hopgood 2011, 133). One campaigner complained an Amnesty Weekly Summary that the organization had come to resemble the very states and corporations against which it campaigns. "I am in no way defending the traditional financial incompetence or inefficiency of many voluntary organizations, but *management of a human rights organization must surely by definition be*

different from that in a margarine factory” (Ibid., emphasis added). My own interviews echoed the frustration with a leadership style that departed so far from its origins as a “church-based” model:

Amnesty grew out of the civil rights movement, and the civil rights movement morphed into the anti-war movement... Now we are getting people who are professional, people who are rotating seats, they were in Greenpeace, next they are at the UN, then at UNICEF... Back in the day it might have been members that represented us, but now we have professionals. (BS)

On the other hand, Amnesty leadership saw it as an essential step to make the organization more “public-facing,” capable of communicating with a broader variety of both members and non-members motivated by issues that often fell outside the traditional boundaries of the founding mandate. Secretary General Ian Martin, for example, resigned in frustration that the democratic pressures of Amnesty’s membership interfered with its ability to conduct its work effectively and efficiently.

I have come to conclude that—despite the sincere commitment and extraordinary hard work of many people in leadership positions—there is a crisis of voluntary leadership in Amnesty International at the international level, as well as in some cases at the national level... The commitment, professionalism, integrity, skills and experience of so many staff at the International Secretariat constitute one of Amnesty International’s greatest assets. The movement has however passed on to its secretariat the burden of growing expectations, while often being impatient both with the message that greater resources are required to meet those demands, and with the lost opportunities which are inevitable when these resources are not available. (1991)

The result of this tension was to concentrate even greater authority in the executive leadership of the organization — not only away from its voluntary membership, described in previous sections, but also away from the professional researchers operating within its International Secretariat in London. When Pierre Sané took over from Ian Martin as General Secretary of the organization in 1992, he set out clear guidelines to support Amnesty’s shift to a catch-all NGO with a strong

executive that could respond to the broader-spectrum human rights movement: there would be “freer section/activist interpretation within the full scope allowed by rules of action and campaigning; less reference to IS professionals for ruling on what is ‘in’ or ‘out’ of scope,” Sané wrote in his mission statement in 1992. By that time, Amnesty had grown into a global operation, with both needs and responsibilities that far reached far beyond the scope of the organigrams that its professionals once designed. As one former executive told me, “We had to hire a professional finance person to run it at the global level. *It’s good to have grassroots and all that — but it’s a different thing when Amnesty has \$350 million at the global level*” (SS).

Far from evolving organically, Amnesty thus began to turn outward to manage its brand support its executive leadership as successive General Secretaries sought to restructure the organization. The executive that I interviewed continued:

We used [the management consulting firm] Accenture a lot for the operational changes at Amnesty. There is a set of skills that are too expensive to source internally. Visioning [sic] and strategy: those we can do ourselves. But execution we give to the consulting firms. In fact, there is not one big NGO that does not have these consulting firms on contract. (SS)

Here, we can see the emergent shift toward the cartel NGO form, with the outsourcing of management decisions to external consulting firms and the resulting convergence among NGOs in structure and operations. Those decisions extend to leadership, as well. To attract top talent to its executive positions, Amnesty — like many of its ‘competitor’ NGOs — contracts head-hunting agencies such as Arabella, Saxon File, and Perrett Laver to lead the search for its top global positions. The result is not only that these leadership positions operate as a “game of musical chairs,” as one Amnesty official described it (BS), with firms approaching candidates that have already served in executive roles at similar organizations. It is also that there is increasing coordination among those executives to forge common agendas and set boundaries around them. One former Amnesty executive told me that — from the sidelines of the UN General Assembly to those of the World Economic Forum at Davos — he would personally convene other executives from leading NGOs to “align on the civil society position... bringing together the ‘back-ends’ of these organizations” (SS). It is this new club of ‘insiders’ — organized informally as well as through fora such as Civicus, InterAction, and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies

(ICVA) — that has shifted the dynamic of leadership from one of competition between NGOs to one of increasingly cartelized, “oligopolistic” (Donini 1995) coordination between them, so far disconnected from the global civil society from which they once drew not only their source of legitimation, but also the talent to power their organic operations.

LEGITIMATION

What is the basis for Amnesty International’s authority? By what logic does Amnesty legitimate its activities as the world’s leading human rights NGO? And how has that process of legitimation changed over three quarters of a century, through both the evolution of global civil society and the maturation of the broader field of non-profit organizations? Previous sections have articulated the transformation of Amnesty’s organizational practices across a wide range of areas, from its strategies for financing its activities to the structure of its relationship to members across the world. This section takes a small step back from these more granular observations to trace the evolution of its logic of legitimation — or how Amnesty both understands and explains its role and function in the system of global governance. The interview data that I marshal in this suggestion suggest a similarly phased process of change from Amnesty’s humble origins to the present day. If the founding cadre understood their role as a form of *resistance* — drawing legitimacy from a collective opposition to the practice of unjust incarceration — the growth of the organization into a mass NGO shifted that logic toward one of *representation*, with staff translating the demands of a global membership into political action. Yet as Amnesty shifted away from its founding mandate to become a catch-all NGO, the logic of *internal* accountability began to shift again toward one of *external* accountability, less focused on the representation of its members than on performance metrics for its newly adapted ‘mission.’ Today, I argue, that logic has begun to shift again — marking a final departure from the sphere of global civil society out of which Amnesty first grew. No longer acting as a vehicle for contestation, Amnesty has come to rely on its reputation for *access* to authority as the means through which it justifies its global operation, assuming a symbiotic function in the system of global governance, rather than resisting against it.

At the birth of the Amnesty ‘movement,’ its founder Peter Benenson was motivated by ‘fire’ — a fiery, righteous opposition to the cruelty of authoritarian repression across the world. As he wrote in a 1961 letter: “To me the whole purpose of AMNESTY (using the movement in its broadest sense) is to re-kindle a fire in the minds of men. It is to give to him who feels cut off from God a sense of belonging to something much greater than himself” (Buchanan 2002, 593). Benenson would position the organization as a brave David taking on the many Goliath states that had imprisoned activists, artists, and opposition figures alike. “If the AMNESTY movement had more influence, no Government would dare flout the basic principles of humanity,” he wrote in a 1963 editorial for the Amnesty *Bulletin*, “because there would be an enraged international public opinion strong enough to protect lonely beings from senseless vengeance.” Here, the legitimization logic of resistance is clearly articulated: the outrage of the global public is pitted against the system of global governance that had hitherto granted impunity to rogue state actors.

Yet that role rapidly changed — both as the membership of the movement ballooned across the world, and as the leadership of the organization assumed formal responsibilities within the multilateral system. By 1964, Amnesty had become one of the first NGOs to achieve “consultative status” at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), establishing an Amnesty office nearby to the headquarters of the United Nations in New York City. As the movement gained traction, its small staff was tasked with translating the demands of its growing membership into concrete appeals on behalf of PoCs; in the words of one Amnesty official, by the end of the decade the organization was already acting as a “marriage broker” (Terlingen 2011) between its base of “enraged” members of the public, the diplomatic community where it had recently arrived, and the other nascent NGOs operating in the emerging field of human rights advocacy. The representative role that Amnesty assumed in this period is well illustrated by its emphasis on “research” and the Department founded to lead it inside the International Secretariat: staff were mandated to construct the dossiers of evidence that could bring greater force to the letter-writing campaigns led by its grassroots membership, often modeled on templates drafted by staff and circulated to national chapters (Ibid.). Members and staff thus worked in concert, with rank-and-file actions of an “enraged international public opinion” granting the appropriate legitimacy for salaried members

of the organization to advocate for policy changes such as the adoption of a Declaration on Torture at the UN General Assembly in 1975.

Over time, however, the increasing demands of Amnesty's voluntary membership strained this representative function — a dynamic traced throughout the preceding sections. The twin processes of professionalization and bureaucratization created what many members felt to be a hypertrophic International Secretariat, deaf to the demands of its membership and the importance of “democratic decision making,” as they complained in a so-called ‘Participian Report’ (1991) presented to the International Council Meeting, or ICM. Authors of the report warned that:

The emergence of such concentration of control and dominance gave the IS a great sense of its importance in the organization; it may even now feel that it is the key to the effectiveness, image and reputation of Amnesty. As it gained central control and dominance, the IS seems to perform the role of “guardian” of AI. It tends to protect AI's image and reputation in the world and resist any apparent threat to that image and reputation. It sees itself as neutral vis-à-vis the political interests of sections and leading members. This role forces it to be defensive and resistant to change. (As quoted in Hopgood 2011, 123)

The research department, for example, came to be seen by members less as a vehicle to support their grassroots campaigns and more as a gate-keeping mechanism for professional staff to choke off democratic input in the name of ‘quality control.’ The apparent tension inside Amnesty in the mass NGO phase of its development was thus one between the legitimating logics of representation and — as its staff understood — effectiveness. The latter won out; by the early 2000s, Amnesty had disbanded its research function all together.

Instead, in its shift from mass to catch-all NGO, Amnesty shifted from a logic of *internal* accountability to one of *external* accountability. In their 2023 study “Is Amnesty Still a Grassroots, Member-Led Organization?” (O'Dell and Veazey), two Amnesty members trace this shift from democratic representation inside the organization toward mechanisms of “consultation” that radically reduced the scope of member input. Specifically, they use interviews and text analysis to

illustrate a shift away from governance debates at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), the traditional forum for grassroots inputs toward stronger representative mechanisms.

As the resolutions process lost credence as the main mechanism for policy change, an alternative consultation process developed based on the concern and forethought of member-leaders, and decisions were more likely to be made through strategic planning committees. The change resulted in members being less likely to suggest policy changes through the resolutions process and more likely to have the opportunity to make their voice heard through consultations, as one respondent noted: ‘we depended in the early days for sections to bring those ideas forward. Now they are much more likely to be brought forward through a centralized process so they *trickle down rather than trickle up*’ (193, emphasis added).

The shift to ‘consultative’ processes contained a political logic of its own — closely related to the maturation of the broader field of human rights advocacy. As organizations like Amnesty assumed greater authority and influence in the system of global governance, so they became vulnerable to attacks on the basis of their accountability. Amnesty, in particular, confronted criticisms for its organic composition in the Global North but heavy emphasis of its advocacy on the states of the Global South (Hopgood 2011). While successive Secretaries General made strides to rebalance the organization’s geography, this tension pushed Amnesty to place greater emphasis on performance metrics over process ones grounded in grassroots representation. One result was the so-called “accountability charter” that Amnesty signed along with ten other major NGOs, “a platform for collective reflection, personal learning and strategic thinking to facilitate individual and collective action on common challenges and opportunities facing [NGOs]” (Charter, 2006). As one senior manager at Amnesty Ireland told O’Dwyer and Unerman (2008),

Amnesty is completely dependent on its reputation and accountability is central to that. We know from independent studies that Amnesty is the most trusted brand in Europe and the second most trusted brand in the world We are so, so careful about what we say and do, if we say it you’ve got to trust it if Amnesty says it’s true (811).

But O'Dwyer and Unerman's study also reveals what they call the "paradox" of Amnesty's accountability method — namely, that this shift toward mechanisms of external accountability is structured less by Amnesty's effort to do good in the world than by its effort to raise money from high-powered donors to sustain its work. The development of "performance accountability indicators" were designed to prove that Amnesty's donors got 'bang for their buck', as one senior member of staff described it:

Our reading of trends is that there is going to be a much more significant public awareness and understanding of the efficacy and impact of NGOs going forward and the public is going to be much more judicious around how it's investing its charity money. The public is becoming much more discerning and they're much more anxious to get bang for their buck, and they're beginning to look for indicators of achievement, they're beginning to look for indicators of impact, they're beginning to look for indicators of efficacy and that means that the reporting mechanisms and the communication mechanisms, the conversation between the organisation and the donor (814).

These findings thus reinforce those presented in the previous section on Amnesty's financing mechanism: the shift in the organization's logic of legitimation has gone hand in hand with the shift in its approach to its donors. Unmoored from its original mandate to support the release of PoCs, Amnesty came to rely on performance metrics as a catch-all NGO seeking to compete in a crowded market of converging NGOs.

Yet the arrival of the cartel NGO should mark another, more qualitative shift in the nature of Amnesty's advocacy — even as it pursues the same metrics of external accountability. Namely, the organization's increasing focus on the quality of its brand should see its operations shift from its founding logic of opposition and toward one that carefully manages its relationships with the political insiders it seeks to influence. In the interviews conducted for this chapter, I argue that we can see this dynamic at work, as Amnesty not only drifts away from its members but also closer to the very actors it once sought to discipline with the mechanism of "outraged public opinion." As one interviewee told me,

Amnesty is moving away from contestation as a tactic for making change. Why? It's this idea that local group members that are autonomous are a risk to the organization... They are a risk to the brand [if] someone goes out and takes on an issue that Amnesty does not have a position on. (RL)

The increasing discipline that Amnesty exercises over its membership is part of a broader strategy to boost that brand by moving closer to government actors it can credibly claim to influence. One Amnesty USA staffer tasked with the organization's lobbying efforts phrased it as follows:

As an organization's influence grows, it's able to make stronger connections with government and with power. As influence grows, there is more of a need to remain aligned with other influencers and other structures of power, not just to get the work done effectively, but also to maintain that status of influence. (BC)

Here, we can see the logic of the cartel NGO, which seeks to curb the oppositional impulses that once lay at the heart of the Amnesty movement in the service of symbiotic relationships with key stakeholders in government. As another Amnesty staff member told me: "The Congressmen that we work with use us as much as we use them" (RL). In a separate interview with a staff member at Amnesty USA, I was told:

Government relations team is all about cultivating partnerships. Their whole approach is: We are not going to name and shame, because that's not how we are going to have an influence. We gain influence, and they gain knowledge. They rely on our knowledge and expertise in a specific issue or area. If there's someone in Congress, they will come to us because they see us as an expert in human rights. (ZM)

The cartel NGO, just like the cartel party, thus develops structured relationships not only to the other NGOs in its organizational field, but also to the global governance actors it once opposed: a dynamic of *parasitic symbiosis* that I set out in the literature review of this chapter. If the previous section articulated the game of "musical chairs" that sees NGO executives move from one leadership position to another, the interview data in this section suggests a "revolving door" that

runs through the global governance institutions themselves — eroding, if not eliminating, the resistance logic all together. Later in the same interview, I was told about the fall-out from the 2016 presidential election, when the unexpected defeat of candidate Hillary Clinton led to sudden unemployment of many Democratic Party actors based in Washington DC. The result was that:

A lot of government people came to the third sector, waiting for the Trump people to get voted out. During that time, we saw far more people in the sector who were focused on getting back into government or getting into government period. Now there is more room for the non-profit sector to push its agenda, with people in government who came out of the sector. (ZM)

This revolving door dynamic reveals the emerging logic of legitimization that corresponds to the cartel NGO: access. Where Amnesty members once marched in the streets and wrote ‘fiery’ letters from home, today the organization is increasingly geared toward its efforts to lobby allies installed in government to advance its agenda — and hit the accountability metrics it once designed for itself. The interviewee concluded:

Our ability to lobby policymakers is now one of our most prized tactics... We are expanding our ability to lobby policymakers. That is front and center, and that has been elevated in the last four years because we have a government relations team. This is because we have to keep up with the times. The president of China is not going to read our letters... So how can we take advantage of the times? We need to change our strategy. (ZM)

CONCLUSION

This chapter developed a novel theoretical framework for the “cartel NGO” and tested its expectations with original data from a case study of Amnesty International. The goal of the chapter was threefold. First, it aimed to adapt the theory of the cartel party to the study of NGOs as strategic actors operating in the field of global governance. Second, it aimed to identify observable

implications of that theory through the evolution of NGO types from *cadre* to *mass* to *catch-all* and finally to the *cartel* form. Third, it aimed to trace that evolution through the case of Amnesty International through analysis of existing literature, original interviews, and internal documentation unearthed in the course of research for this chapter.

The findings of this chapter reveal an emerging logic of cartelization in the case of Amnesty that may be generalized through further research. Across each of the seven dimensions articulated in the chapter's theoretical framework, I documented the transformation of both Amnesty's internal practices and external relationships to reveal a significant transformation in the nature of Amnesty's aims, operations, form and function in the broader system of global governance. The findings presented in this chapter suggest that these dynamics may be common across the large NGOs that have come to dominate the field of non-profit advocacy — far beyond the narrow scope of Amnesty's founding mandate to free so-called Prisoners of Conscience, or PoCs.

The emergent trend of cartelization among these large NGOs thus helps to resolve the puzzle set at the beginning of this chapter. Bush and Hadden's (2019) recent research has revealed a startling reversal of a trend that was once considered to be continuous and linear — namely, the rapid decline in the formation of NGOs in the United States. This observation has raised important questions about both the causes of NGO development as well as the consequences of the more recent 'saturation' of the NGO ecosystem. If scholars once converged on a consensus about the increasing importance of NGOs in the sphere of global governance, then Bush and Hadden's findings give urgent motivation to revisit that consensus and its underlying assumptions.

The concept of the cartel NGO provides one possible answer — and may help to resolve the long-standing debate about the essence of NGOs and the nature of the broader field in which they coordinate, compete, and contend. The evolution of the NGO ecosystem, I have argued, is similar to the development of other markets, subject to the corrosive effects of imbalanced market power that skew outcomes away from ideal outcomes such as quality and efficiency. On the contrary, large NGOs such as Amnesty have shifted dramatically away from their founding form as small-scale, cadre-led, and mandate-oriented organizations toward an increasingly cartelized one that

prioritizes its own access, influence, and financial success even to the detriment of its stated mission and the demands of its global membership.

Such a finding holds important implications for the study of global civil society and the prospects for a more democratic form of globalization. Global civil society was once considered to be the primary vehicle to democratize the system of global governance, otherwise dominated by powerful states and transnational corporations. According to that view, NGOs emerged as the organizational form to give voice and power to populations that were otherwise marginalized by the process of international integration. The emergence of the cartel NGO suggests the possibility that these organizations may become delinked from the global civil society out of which they grew — much as the cartel party delinked from the domestic civil society from which it emerged to help democratize political systems at the national level. These dynamics thus cast doubt on the underlying assumption of the increasing ‘openness’ (Tallberg et al 2013) of the global governance system, challenging scholars to examine more closely how such openings have been made, for whom, and how the nature of the interactions between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the global governance system may be evolving over time. Indeed, the concept of the cartel NGO calls to reconsider the very topology of that metaphor — and ask whether NGOs like Amnesty can still be considered to act as ‘outsiders’ all together. The answer to that question holds valuable lessons for both scholars of global governance and advocates of a more democratic and equitable international order.

4.

A NEW NIEO “MOMENT”

INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarship has posited that the post-war international order is either in an advanced state of decay (Goddard et al. 2025), a period of rapid decline (Mearsheimer 2019), or may have already disappeared altogether (Ikenberry 2020). Many of its preeminent institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), have been actively impaired by powerful state actors such as the United States government (Pollack 2023). Others, like the United Nations, no longer appear fit for their purpose, unable or unwilling to deliver on their founding mission in the context of flagrant violations of international law in places like Ukraine and Palestine (Gowan 2023). In the context of such institutional paralysis, scholars have noted the rise of new formations such as the BRICS to renew if not replace the institutional architecture of the multilateral system (Stuenkel 2020). We are, in the words of India’s former Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon (2022), “between orders.”

Such a process of decomposition has led to two conflicting interpretations of the order to come. One set of accounts has focused on “great power competition” (Allison 2017) as the guiding logic of the incipient international order: dominant states making unilateral decisions on the basis of their perceived national interests, and smaller states having little choice but to follow suit. Director-General of the World Trade Organization Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (2023), for example, has warned that dominant states would prefer a “power-based rather than a rules-based order”; scholars such as Anne-Marie Slaughter (2017), meanwhile, have warned that the breakdown of the existing order

may return us “to the basic anarchy of the international realm until another great power or group of powers takes up the task of creating and imposing new rules.” Another set of accounts, by contrast, has traced the contours of a more ‘multipolar’ order in formation (Acharya 2017), a complex but functional global system in which unilateral whims of dominant states are held in check by regional, thematic, or ideologically oriented institutional formations. According to these scholars, the new globe will be governed not by one set of rules, but by multiple, overlapping if sometimes conflicting sets of them (Taggart 2022). Against the anxieties of “anarchy,” these accounts suggest that a more balanced international order is already emerging from the ashes of the old, unipolar one — even if its institutional architecture bears little resemblance to its predecessor.

Neither prediction, however, leaves room for the possibility of a new international order that is grounded in common rules and common institutions based on common interests. More specifically, both of these dominant accounts presume that the window for genuine international dialogue, diplomacy, or deliberation has now closed; either great powers will succeed in bullying their neighbors to accept new and unequal terms of engagement, or smaller powers will succeed to build alternative arrangements that are resilient against such methods of coercion — even if it means closing their borders to potential cooperation on key issues such as climate, health, or trade. In this sense, both the great power paradigm and the multipolarity one grant only marginal roles to small, poor, or ‘Global Southern’ powers in the articulation of the international order to come — a surprising absence, given new evidence that the “backlash” against globalization (Walter 2021) has not yet diffused to developing contexts where it still enjoys widespread popular support (Rudra et al 2021). In the best of cases, Southern countries are left alone to navigate the new freewheeling anarchy among themselves. In the worst, they become props of great powers against which they have little power to bargain on behalf of their interests. In neither scenario are these Southern nations granted the agency or opportunity to play a part in the reconstruction of an international order — let alone that this order may represent “the interests of mankind as a whole.” in the words of former Algerian diplomat Mohammed Bedjaoui.

Buried in the recent flurry of scholarly speculation is the historical memory of the last time that the world was “waiting for the new order” (Barracough 1976) — or how the poorer nations of the Global South, and its leaders like Bedjaoui, sought to shape it on behalf of all mankind. 50 years

ago, the world confronted a similar “polycrisis” (Tooze 2022) to the one that we face today, as the combined crises of energy and economic growth ripped through the existing alignments of the post-war era, placing the institutional architecture of the global economy first developed at Bretton Woods under existential strain. “What is at issue,” wrote Barraclough back then, “is the validity, or at least the acceptability to the majority of the world’s inhabitants, of the economic system which has dominated the world since the great outward thrust of the industrialized West a century ago.” The result was a very similar sense of suspension articulated by Slaughter (2017): “There is still the question whether the outcome will be a new international order or a new international anarchy” (16).

Back then, it was the nations of the so-called “Third World” (Prashad 2007) that mobilized to answer Barraclough’s question. Between conferences in cities like Bandung, Cairo, and Havana, the leaders of these newly independent nations developed proposals for a new system of trade that would reduce the dependencies of the least developed economies; a new system of finance that would enhance investment in their industrialization; and a new system of natural resource management that would secure national sovereignty over their extraction and distribution. Finally, in 1974 — through the Group of 77 (G77) convened to the United Nations by the architects of this shared vision — the General Assembly adopted by consensus the Declaration on the Establishment of the New International Economic Order (3201 S-VI) and the Program of Action (3202 S-VS) for its implementation. The New International Economic Order — or NIEO, the abbreviation for which the program of action came to be known — was thus not a vision *for* the Third World, as contemporary theories of “Southern multilateralism” (Roy 2022) suggest may come to replace the fraying unipolar order. Rather, the NIEO constituted a vision *from* the Third World for global governance at large — positive-sum in its balance (in contrast to present theories of great power competition) and universal in its application (in contrast to present theories of multipolarity).

In the years since, however, the NIEO has not only been declared “dead” (Mitchell 1993), but also “almost completely forgotten” (Gilman 2015). The Program of Action, so hard-won against the initial resistance of the world’s developed nations, went unenforced. The proposals, incubated over two decades in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), lost potency. And the international coalition that once fought for their implementation began to look, in the rearview mirror, like “at best little more than an irrelevance and at worst an absurdity” (Williams 1993, 7). The NIEO “moment” that

began at Bandung had, by the following decade, been “bookended” (Benjamin 2015) by a new moment during which the ideas of the NIEO’s ideological opponents — later known by the name “neoliberalism” (Slobodian 2018) — established their hegemony. “We should not seek to create new institutions,” President Ronald Reagan told the International Meeting on Cooperation and Development in Cancun, Mexico in October 1981. The Third World had, in the words of one contemporaneous observer, “clearly ‘lost’ the war” (Rothstein 1988).

Today, however, there are signs of the NIEO’s revival amid the ongoing deterioration of the neoliberal order that once took its place. In 2022, the Group of 77 — since expanded to include all 134 members of the so-called ‘Global South’, with the additional support of the People’s Republic of China — won the Resolution A/77/445 DR at the UN General Assembly “Towards a New International Economic Order,” with both a familiar set of proposals and a familiar vote distribution between Southern support and Northern opposition. One year later, after nearly a decade without convening its heads of state, the G77 held not one but two formal Summits: the first, in Havana, dedicated to the Science, Technology, and Innovation agenda; the second, in Kampala, to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Group and reinvigorate its “supreme decision-making body”. The gatherings of the G77 did not just yield stronger affective ties between their governments. At the 2023 Conference of Parties (COP28) negotiations in Dubai, the Group secured a breakthrough agreement to finance the Loss and Damage Fund (LDF) in a gesture of unity across its historic divide between oil producers and oil importers, heavy fossil fuel consumers and endangered small island developing states. The signs of the NIEO’s revival thus reach past the confines of the Global South. From the sudden application of US tariffs to the response by its geopolitical adversary China to restrict exports of rare earth metals, the global debate about the international order — its equity, its endurance, and its alternatives — is back, yet little scholarship to date has examined the prospects for such a renewed effort to rejuvenate the process of globalization on more egalitarian terms.

50 years from passage of the original UN declaration, this chapter thus aims to assess whether we are once again living through a new NIEO “moment,” and what such a moment might mean for the future of the international order. Has the NIEO really been resurrected from the dead? Did it ever really die? What were the essential components of the original NIEO project, and what were the critical conditions under which the Group of 77 was able to advance them? Can we detect those

conditions in the current modes of deliberation, organization, and political practice of the G77? Looking both backwards and forwards, how might we evaluate the past, present, and future prospects of the New International Economic Order from the present conjuncture of ‘polycrisis’? To answer these questions, I develop and deploy three sources of data on the Group of 77, the collective author of the NIEO. The first is the corpus of speeches from the leaders of the G77 nations at the General Assembly from 1946 to 2023. First introduced by Baturo et al. (2017), the General Debate Corpus contains the full and officially translated texts from G77 heads of state and government representatives delivered at the UN opening sessions each September, allowing us to track both the individual and collective prevalence of themes, proposals, and priorities of the G77 on the world’s largest stage (Smith 2003, Steffek 2003, Binder and Heupel 2015, Kentikelenis and Voeten 2020). The second source of data comes from a series of 40 interviews conducted by the author between January and March 2024 with Presidents, Ministers, UN Ambassadors, and former Chairs of the Group of 77. While the General Assembly data allow us to assess the salience of certain themes, individual interviews allow us to make better sense of the precise motivations behind the G77’s public pronouncements, and — crucially — their assessments of the prospects for diplomatic rhetoric to translate into real political action. The third source of data comes from participant observation at the Third South Summit in Kampala in January 2024 — the first South Summit in nearly 20 years — which provide unique insight into the internal operations of the G77 and the process by which its “supreme decision-making body” manages the challenge of building consensus among the 134 member-states convened to the Summit.

Together, these data support this chapter’s evaluation of the NIEO “moment.” My analysis yields three main arguments. The first is the NIEO is far from dead. On the contrary, the same structural conditions that motivated the original NIEO — imbalanced terms of trade, insufficient financing for development, or inequitable access to critical technology — persist today, as does the Brandt Line that separates the poorer nations from the richer ones (Lees 2021). If the “moment” of neoliberal hegemony succeeded in concealing those conditions, the present breakdown of that hegemony has once again revealed them, opening fertile ground for the Group of 77 to rebuild a sense of “common interest and concern” (Bandung Communiqué 1955) among the nations of the Global South. The second argument, however, is that the resurrected NIEO is marked by fundamental — and debilitating — differences to its predecessor. The original NIEO was carried

not only by common interests, but also by a common narrative guiding human history toward economic decolonization. The data presented in this chapter show that this shared project of economic decolonization disappeared — only to be replaced only by the quixotic narrative of a coming “multipolar world” (Lula da Silva and Amorim 2022). As a result, the *proactive* struggle for what Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere once called “economic liberation” has been replaced by a *reactive* defense of the multilateral system; and the *transformative* vision of non-alignment has been replaced by a *transactional* one. As such, this chapter makes a third argument that while the South may be increasingly understood to as a bloc *in* itself, it does not (yet) act *for* itself. Despite their greater wealth and resources, the nations of the G77 today turn to greater powers of both East and West to realize its vision of a New International Economic Order, rather than seeking to build collective power from inside the Southern bloc. The NIEO may have been resurrected, then, but without the strength of this structural leverage, it will remain a ‘Zombie’ NIEO, staggering where it once walked.

The rest of the chapter proceeds in six parts. The first revisits the literature on the New International Economic Order, the diverse historical accounts of its ‘failure’, and theoretical gaps that those accounts have left for contemporary scholars to make sense of the conditions under which it might succeed. The second sets out a novel theoretical framework of the NIEO “moment”, including a new tractable definition and the elaboration of the six key conditions under which it is made possible. The third part of the chapter clarifies the central argument of this chapter, adjudicating the question of whether we may understand the present conjuncture as an NIEO “moment” and why, offering an extended table based on the theoretical framework put forwarded in the previous section. The fourth part of the chapter presents the empirical data that I will use to test those arguments, and the respective merits of each source in shedding light on the dynamics of the Group of 77. The fifth part of the chapter then moves through each of the component conditions of an NIEO moment, deploying the chapter’s original data to evaluate the extent to which each is present in the present conjuncture. I conclude the chapter with an assessment of the direction of the present NIEO, and a proposal for a new research agenda that applies the lessons of the rich historical research on the original NIEO to the ongoing efforts to realize its vision in the twenty-first century.

LITERATURE

How have scholars made sense of past efforts by Southern nations to reshape the international order? How do accounts of the New International Economic Order, more specifically, view of the political dynamics that guided its trajectory from Bandung to Cancun? And what can a review of this literature tell us about the prospects for a new NIEO “moment”? In this section, I review literature on the NIEO across the two periods of its intensive study. The first was contemporaneous, as scholars — as well as journalists, pundits, and policy thinkers — sought to make sense of these emergent proposals for the re-globalization of the world economy. The second is contemporary, as a new generation of scholars has revisited the history of the NIEO in an effort to recover its lessons for the study of global governance reform. Each corresponds to a moment in which the international order appeared to be “opening up” (Slaughter and LaForge 2021), creating opportunities for the reconfiguration of its institutions.

Across both time periods, however, scholarship has tended to focus on the dynamics of the NIEO’s *failure*. Specifically, scholars have been less interested in the precise conditions that made the articulation of the NIEO possible, and more interested in developing theories to explain how this robust vision for global governance reform failed to move out of the United Nations General Assembly and into the world outside, as mandated by the unanimous resolution passed in 1974. “The ‘great debate’ of the 1970s on the New International Economic Order,” wrote Columbia University Professor Robert Rothstein, “seems to have ended with a conclusive defeat for the South” (Rothstein 1988, p. 725). Less than 15 years after the passage of the UN Declaration, Rothstein’s assessment of the NIEO as a “failed protest” had already hardened into both an academic and political consensus. Even its most fervent supporters, such as the great world-systems theorist Samir Amin, had proclaimed “the failure of the so-called NIEO and the disintegration of the Third World” as early as 1982 (Amin 1982, p. 432).

Scholars attempting to explain this spectacular demise have fallen into three broad camps: *beyond*, *between*, and *within* the member-states of the Group of 77. Each of these explanations holds important insights for the study of Southern-led efforts to reconstruct the international order. But I will argue that, together, they have served to foreclose the development of a robust theory of the

precise conditions under which poorer nations can mount a constructive challenge to the architecture of globalization.

The first camp — *beyond* the bloc of the G77 — locates the failure of the NIEO in the imbalance of power between a developing South and a developed North. While leaders of rich countries in Europe and North America may have publicly professed sympathy, or even agreement, with the aims of the NIEO — World Bank President and former US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara once described its pro-poor policies as “prescriptions not only of principle but of prudence” — they privately pushed to dismantle the Third World coalition behind it. The goal was, in the words of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, to “pull [the NIEO’s] teeth and divide these countries up” (Sargent 2015). Incredibly, by the standards of the Ford administration, Kissinger was considered a dove. As Sargent (Ibid.) uncovered in a 1975 memo, Ford’s Assistant for Economic Affairs attacked Kissinger behind his back for willingness to “acquiesce in, or compromise with” a “new international economic order based on socialist principles” (209). The NIEO, by this account, did not stand a chance against “the concerted opposition from the North Atlantic ruling classes” (Ozsü 2023).

The second camp holds that the NIEO failed not because it pitted the South against the North, but because it pitted the South against itself: a focus on the fault lines *between* the members of the G77. According to this account, the project of Third World unity was at best utopian, and at worst delusional; Benjamin (2015), for example, notes that “broad schisms” were visible since the Bandung days, when some nations of the decolonized bloc opted for true non-alignment while others entered into security arrangements (e.g. the South East Asian Treaty Organization) that brought them into direct military submission to the great Northern powers. By the time of the UN Declaration, another “enormous fissure” (Gillman 2015, 7) would open between the oil-producing nations of the G77 — cartelized in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) — and the oil-importing nations for which OPEC’s market power presented a threat (of price hikes) as much as it did an opportunity (for shared Southern revenue). By this account, the Bandung spirit that once carried the Non-Aligned Movement to articulate proposals of “common interest and concern,” as the Bandung Communiqué described it, was always bound to dissipate in the face of the South’s many social, political, and economic divisions.

The third camp eschews this geopolitical analysis to focus on the internal dynamics of the NIEO's author nations — *within* the member-states of the G77 itself. Some of those dynamics were structural: the late 1970s saw Southern nations accumulate external debts for which they had declining capacity to pay; the ensuing wave of debt crises that crashed over the global South distracted from and destroyed the prospects of a powerful challenge to the existing international economic order. Other dynamics were more personalistic in nature: the death of India's Nehru was followed by the death of Egypt's Nasser, which was followed by that of Algeria's Boumédiène; one by one, the great leaders of the high decolonial era disappeared from the debate, and new domestic forces emerged to drive their respective countries away from the policies and principles of the NIEO (Prashad 2013). By this account, the political coalition that underpinned the decolonial agenda — namely, the unity of classes forged in the movements of national liberation — was always bound to disintegrate even in the absence of a concentrated external enemy.

Together, these camps have combined to generate a common *fatalistic* view of the New International Economic Order. According to that view, the failure of the NIEO was not only overdetermined by the interaction of these internal and external factors. It was also irreversible: The South had, in the words of Rothstein (1988), “clearly ‘lost’ the war,” leading to dark age of scholarship in which the NIEO was “almost completely forgotten” (Gilman 2015). As a result, far less scholarship has focused on defining the context and content of an NIEO “moment” — what made it possible for such diverse nations to articulate a common vision for a new kind of globalization, what allowed that vision to garner such widespread support at the level of the United Nations, and by extension, what might enable a successor project to take shape today.

The absence of a clear definition for such an NIEO “moment” represents an important theoretical lacuna far beyond the scholarship on the particular project itself. Indeed, the original NIEO was — at the time — merely the latest effort to articulate an alternative to a previously hegemonic system at a moment of interregnum between “orders.” In his “Ruling the Interregnum” (2019), for example, Rune Møller Stahl (2019) notes that the “periods between stable hegemonies remain distinctly undertheorized” (1), tracing key periods throughout the twentieth century — from the ‘Interwar interregnum’ through to the ‘Post-2008 interregnum’ — when projects have competed

to established hegemony in a moment of “punctuated equilibrium” (10), when ‘stable blocs’ and longstanding ‘consensus’ becomes interrupted by crisis and contention.

Many of the hegemonic projects traced out in Stahl’s stylized timeline were driven forward by the dominant powers of their time — pushing, as it were, on the open door of punctuated equilibrium. Yet in other moments throughout history, it is rising powers — previously excluded from the high table of global governance — that have seized the opportunity to reconfigure its institutions. In *The Great Transformation* (1944), Karl Polanyi writes of the breakdown of the nineteenth century order that once structured the hierarchy of European powers — and the opportunistic efforts by countries like Germany to seize that moment of transition:

Countries...which, for reasons of their own, are opposed to the status quo, would be quick to discover the weaknesses of the existing institutional order and to anticipate the creation of institutions better adapted to their interests. Such groups are pushing that which is falling and holding onto that which, under its own steam, is moving their way. It may seem as if they had originated the process of social change, while actually they were merely its beneficiaries, and may even be perverting the trend to make it serve their own aims (30).

Polanyi’s account points to the importance of a tractable theory of the *conditions* under which such a challenge is made possible — a “moment”, in the vocabulary of this chapter — in order that we can assess the empirical prospects for a new NIEO to succeed where its predecessor once failed. I now turn to that theory.

THEORY

This section develops a novel theoretical framework for the NIEO “moment” — both providing a tractable definition for that moment and articulating the conditions under which we might detect it. The goal is not to develop a general theory of geopolitical transformation or the emergence of a new international order. Rather, building from the rich literature on the NIEO across its two major periods of scholarly production, I will focus my efforts on the specific *type* of turning point in which the South is able to act collectively to seize the opportunity of a shift in the terms of

global governance. Combining the general insights from Polanyi's historical observation with the particular circumstances of the post-war NIEO, we might define an NIEO "moment" as one in which *the world's less developed nations advance an alternative vision of global economic governance to contend with the actually existing system sustained by the world's more developed nations.*

Such a definition serves to restrict the scope of theoretical and empirical inquiry by highlighting the four critical elements of the NIEO moment. The first is the unit of the *nation-state*: the 'international' aspect of the New International Economic Order focuses our attention on the role that nation-states play in organizing the institutions of globalization, in contrast to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) explored in the previous chapter, the transnational networks highlighted by scholars like Kathryn Sikkink and Margaret Keck (1999), or supranational institutions (Kentikelenis et al. 2016) that have frequently dominated the global rules of the game. The second is the protagonism of the *poor*: the 'new' in the NIEO refers not only to novelty, but to a new world born of the territorial decolonization of the post-war period, when previously oppressed peoples won their independence from the old colonial powers. As Frantz Fanon wrote in his *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), "decolonization is the veritable creation of new men," setting an axis of antagonism not between competing superpowers, but between the less developed and more developed nations in the international system. The third is the focus on the *economy*: those "new men" located the source of their oppression in the institutions of global economic governance that all but guaranteed their underdevelopment; the definition thus focuses on the articulation of alternative economic institutions, rather than purely political or procedural reforms to global governance. And the fourth is the constructive dynamic of contention: the NIEO moment requires that nation-states struggle in the sphere of global governance to help shape a new 'order,' rather than simply ripping it apart; far from dragging the world back into total war, the architects of the NIEO were tasked were "entrusted with the responsibility of militating for the new order that would make such development possible, acting not simply on its own behalf but as a representative of the 'whole world community'" (Ozsü 2015, p. 131). It is this effort to develop an order that "embraces for its objective the happiness of mankind" — in the words of former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere (1977) — that sets the NIEO apart from the contemporary accounts of great power competition and multipolar harmony.

Having proposed this definition, I turn to the question: What are the conditions that make such an NIEO moment possible? In the subsections that follow, I draw on the historical NIEO literature to identify six such conditions, individually necessary and jointly sufficient to qualify as an NIEO moment. It is impossible to step in the same geopolitical river twice: even if the original conditions can be found again, their nature will define the trajectory of any given NIEO project in its time. As such, these conditions are not defined in binary terms; each requires qualification, and the goal of this section is both to develop the theoretical tools to define those conditions, their evolution, and their present application.

Interregnum: An NIEO moment requires the *old* to give way to the *new*. That opening can be created through sudden rupture, such as world war, economic crisis, or environmental disaster. Or that opening can be produced through sustained decay of the existing international order, such as through the overreach, hyperextension, or diplomatic miscalculation of a leading world power. In all cases, the NIEO requires as its precondition the tectonic shifts of the geopolitical plates in such a way that unsettles the existing order and creates a new political opportunity to replace it.

Activation: Many crises go to waste. An NIEO moment thus requires not only that the existing international order enter into crisis, but also — as Polanyi noted — that poor countries “discover” that crisis and “anticipate” their own role in its potential resolution. In other words, the leaders of the less developed nations both carry concerns about the present state of global economic governance and also identify those concerns as common between them.

Aspiration: Once activated, though, those leaders require a sense of direction. To achieve an NIEO moment, the world’s less developed nations must thus develop a common project — to move beyond a shared sense of where they are now to arrive at a shared sense of where they are going. That aspiration can cut across traditional ideological dimensions such as capitalism and socialism; the critical condition is the articulation of a horizon — a new order — toward which these nations aspire.

Coalition: That aspiration cannot remain tacit in nature. Rather, an NIEO moment requires the formation of coalition that institutionalizes the pursuit of their common project. The nature of that coalition can vary widely, in its size, scope, and strength. But an NIEO relies critically on the explicit alliance of less developed nations to bring its vision to life.

Program: An NIEO moment means that the aspiration for a New International Economic Order moves out of the realm of abstraction and into the concrete. The leaders of the less developed nations must articulate proposals for the “creation of institutions better adapted to their interests” (Polanyi 1944) — whether economic, legal, or political in nature — and generate a programmatic consensus across their coalition.

Power: To advance that vision, the coalition requires a degree of structural power. The interregnum may naturally enhance that structural power, or — by motivating traditional powers to pursue ever more violent means of holding onto their privileges — the interregnum may endanger it. But to achieve an NIEO moment, the program cannot remain dead letter; the coalition must also discover its collective power to advance, however partially, its core proposals.

To answer the questions set out in the introduction to this chapter, I will make three moves. The first is to evaluate the extent to which each of the above conditions is present in the new geopolitical conjuncture. The second is to assess the qualitative similarities or differences between the past and present expressions of those conditions. And the third is to determine the implications of those differences for the prospects of a new NIEO moment. I will briefly articulate the chapter’s overall argument before presenting the empirical data from which I will draw to make it.

ARGUMENT

Building from the novel theoretical framework set out in the previous section, I will argue in this chapter that while the present conditions appear ripe for an NIEO moment, the past half-century has seen the systematic erosion in both the capacity and commitment of the Group of 77 to advance an alternative vision of global economic governance. More specifically, I argue that the structural motivations for the NIEO are very similar today as they were 50 years ago — precisely because the underlying material conditions never really changed. Revisiting the concept of the ‘Brandt Line’ — coined by German Chancellor Willy Brandt to describe the developmental divide between Global North and South — I will not only show that this *economic* divergence has endured since the prior interregnum of the 1970s. I will also argue that recent *political* crises — such as the vaccine apartheid of Covid-19 and the abandonment of climate targets by historical polluters in the Global North — have reactivated a sense of Southern solidarity among the less developed nations to redress these inequities.

However, while the first two conditions of *interregnum* and *activation* may be satisfied by the present conjuncture, I will argue that the Group of 77 is today incapable and unwilling to satisfy the conditions that remain. The terms of the G77’s original *aspiration*, for example, have been inverted. Fifty years ago, it was the nations of the developing world that banded together to advance a vision of economic decolonization — and exercised structural leverage through mechanisms like the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to do so. Today, however, it is leaders like US President Donald Trump, based in the developed world of the Global North, who are weaponizing their structural power to warp the global economy to fit their interests (Farrell and Newman 2019) — forcing G77 nations onto a backfoot defense of the multilateral system they once decried as discriminatory. In other words, the G77’s proactive posture — once forged in the furnace of the struggles for decolonization and the Non-Aligned Movement that emerged from them — has become a reactive one.

To help explain such an inversion, I argue that it is necessary to get inside of the G77 and examine the *coalitional* politics of development in the Global South today. While the G77 has illustrated remarkable endurance as a bloc of states, I argue, the nature of that coalition has changed drastically over the past half-century. In the 1970s, the G77 could be described as coalition of

popular national leaders brought together by a common vision developed through institutions such as the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Today, however, the G77 is better described as a coalition of career diplomats brought together by a common tradition, vocabulary, and *esprit de corps*, but disconnected from the country capitals where the key decisions about developmental policy are made — in many cases, in direct contradiction to the principles set out in the UN Resolutions that supposedly define the project of the New International Economic Order. The result is not only the absence of genuinely shared *program*, but also the disappearance of the institutions that once granted to developing nations the *power* to realize it. I summarize the comparison of these conditions in Table 9 below.

TABLE 9: COMPARISON OF CONDITIONS FOR THE NIEO “MOMENT”

Conditions		1970s	2020s
<i>Interregnum</i>		Oil Crisis, Nixon Shock, Bretton Woods Collapse	2008 Financial Crisis, Covid-19 Pandemic, New Populism
<i>Activation</i>		Bandung Conference, Non-Aligned Movement, UN Conference on Trade & Development	Vaccine Apartheid, Gaza War, Climate Collapse and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
<i>Aspiration</i>		Winning Economic Decolonization	Defending the Multilateral System
<i>Coalition</i>		Presidents & Prime Ministers of the Group of 77	Diplomats of the Group of 77
<i>Program</i>		UN Resolution 3201 (S-VI) (Backed by Domestic Agenda)	UN Resolution A/RES/79/215 (Undermined by Domestic Agenda)
<i>Power</i>		Resource Cartels, e.g. Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, International Bauxite Association (IBA), Intergovernmental Council of Countries Exporting Copper, Association of Iron Ore Exporting Countries	Diplomatic Forums, e.g. BRICS, Community of Latin American & Caribbean States (CELAC), African Union (AU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

DATA & METHODS

This section presents the three sources of original data that I will deploy to test this chapter's arguments about the new NIEO "moment." Each of them focuses on the Group of 77 as principal actor in the story of the New International Economic Order. The G77 was established at the founding United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in June 1964, and became the primary the forum through which the central proposals contained in the 1974 NIEO resolution were developed under the leadership of Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch. There, the 77 founding nations — all hailing from the Non-Aligned Movement that grew out of decolonization — signed a 'Joint Declaration' that corresponds closely to the definition articulated in the theory section above:

The developing countries regard their own unity...as the outstanding feature of this Conference. This unity has sprung out of the fact that facing the basic problems of development they have a common interest in a new policy for international trade and development...The developing countries have a strong conviction that there is a vital need to maintain, and strengthen further, this unity in the years ahead. It is an indispensable instrument for securing the adoption of new attitudes and new approaches in the international economic field. This unity is also an instrument for enlarging the area of co-operative endeavor in the international field and for securing mutually beneficial relationships with the rest of the world. Finally, it is a necessary means for cooperation amongst the developing countries themselves (Joint Statement, 1964).

In the years that followed, the G77 thus emerged as "de facto institutionalization... to become the standard mode of interaction between rich and poor nations on the global level" (Gosovic and Ruggie 1976, 640). Since then, the Group has not only established chapters to represent its members across the multilateral system, from New York (headquarters of the United Nations General Assembly) to Rome (headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization) to Washington DC (headquarters of the International Monetary Fund and World bank). It has also expanded to include all 134 developing nations across the world. As the only such diplomatic institution to bargain on behalf of the less developed nations, I therefore focus my empirical inquiry on the operations, activities, and key figures of the G77.

The first source of data comes from the United Nations General Assembly. Borrowing from Baturu et al. (2017), I examine the full General Debate corpus from UNGA between the years of 1946 to 2023, coding thousands of full, translated speeches from heads of state, government, and country delegation in *R* in order to track the relevance of key terms related to the original NIEO program over time. I selected this corpus — over a similar body of text from G77 summits or meetings of the Non-Aligned Movement — for two reasons. First, the limited time budget of 15 minutes requires leaders to choose their thematic priorities carefully (Kentikelenis and Voeten 2020). And second, because the speeches delivered to the global body of the General Assembly are more likely to reveal the state of contention between South and North countries, as compared to (i) those delivered to fellow-traveling allies in the closer quarters of G77 gatherings, or (ii) those delivered to domestic audiences, in which leaders are may be motivated to externalize national grievances to foreign forces (Vreeland 2003; Dreher and Gassebner 2012). The corpus thus offers a rich set of data both to make sense of the Group of 77’s collective position as well as its salience across the broader international community. More critically, the diachronic scale of the corpus allows us to trace those positions through and between NIEO “moments,” not only to identify the presence of particular conditions described above, but also to test how they might be changing qualitatively over the past half-century.

The second source of data comes from semi-structured interviews that I conducted both in-person and virtually between January 2024 and March 2025. These interviews focused on key figures inside the G77, ranging from the staff in its Secretariat to former Chairs that have presided over its rotating presidency pro-tempore over the past two decades. Such data open the black box of the G77 to allow for a more detailed account of the Group’s internal dynamics, helping us to move beyond the text analysis of the corpus to test for the presence of certain conditions such as the state of the coalition and the content of its program. Also, by interviewing key G77 figures that have played a role over the course of the past five decades, these interviews shed light on the dynamic story of the rise, fall, and potential revival of the NIEO today. Table 3 below sets out a select list of interviewees in this chapter.

The third source of data comes from participant-observation at the Third South Summit of the G77 in Kampala, Uganda. There, I attended high-level ministerial meetings, participated in sideline

seminars, as well as conducted interviews with key delegates and negotiators from a wide range of participating countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The goal of this fieldwork was to move beyond the second-hand accounts of the semi-structured interviews in order to witness first-hand the political dynamics at play in the Group’s “supreme decision-making body” — the first time that this body had convened in nearly two decades. These observations thus allow for an even greater level of accuracy in the evaluation that follows of the conditions for a new NIEO “moment”.

Together, the combination of these three sources of original data aim to form a more holistic picture of the G77 over the course of its recent development. With a few recent exceptions (e.g. Toye 2018; Lees 2023), the G77 remains largely absent from the study of global governance — in part due to the difficulty of accessing the staff in its Secretariat and, additionally, due to the speed with which its annual presidency pro-tempore travels from country to country. While therefore partial in scope, the data collected for this chapter aim to shed light on the most important vehicle for the representation of the developing world’s interests, how its conception of those interests has changed over time, and how those interests today contend with those of the developed world with which it bargains in the annals of global governance. I summarize each of these methods, the logic of their selection, their utility and their limitations in Table 10 below.

TABLE 10: DATA SOURCES ON THE G77 AND THE NIEO “MOMENT”

Method	Focus	Level	Strengths	Limitations
UN General Debate Corpus (1946–2023)	Discursive and thematic evolution of the G77’s collective priorities.	Macro-level evidence of how the G77 articulates its aspirations and self-understanding in the global arena.	Longitudinal perspective across multiple “NIEO moments” enables systematic tracking of shifting discourse.	Limited to official, public rhetoric, and may obscure behind-the-scenes negotiation or hidden domestic constraints.
Semi-Structured Elite Interviews (2024–2025)	Motivations, internal perceptions, and political logic behind G77 positions.	Meso-level, actor-centric insight to explain why discourse patterns in the corpus emerge and how they are operationalized (or not) in practice.	Opens the “black box” of the G77’s internal operations to captures elite assessments of whether rhetorical unity translates into collective action.	Subject to recall bias, political self-presentation, and limited representation of rank-and-file perspectives.
Participant Observation (Third South Summit, Kampala 2024)	Real-time practice of diplomacy, coalition-building, and negotiation dynamics among 134 member states.	Micro-level, process-tracing data showing how the G77’s discourse and intentions are enacted (or hollowed out) in everyday multilateral practice.	Provides behavioral evidence of how consensus is (or fails to be) built and reveals contrasts between formal declarations and informal interactions.	Restricted to single set of observations from one summit, where researcher positionality may affect access or interpretation.

TABLE 11: SELECTED LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Name	Country	Role
Mourad Ahmia	Algeria	Executive Secretary, Group of 77
Sacha Llorenti	Bolivia	Former Chair, Group of 77
Rebeca Grynspan	Costa Rica	Secretary-General, UN Trade and Development
Celinda Sosa Lunda	Bolivia	Foreign Minister
Adriana Abdenur	Brazil	Special Advisor to the President
José Miguel Ahumada	Chile	Undersecretary of International Economic Relations
Yuefen Li	China	Director, UNCTAD Debt and Development
Pedro Pedroso	Cuba	Former Chair, Group of 77
Carlos Cossio	Cuba	Deputy Foreign Minister
Andrés Arauz	Ecuador	Former Minister, Central Bank Governor
Guillaume Long	Ecuador	Former Chair, Group of 77
Ralph Gonsalves	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Prime Minister
Rob Davies	South Africa	Former Minister of Trade and Industry of South Africa
Chrispin Phiri	South Africa	Spokesperson, Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation
Richard Kozul-Wright	United Kingdom	Director, UNCTAD Globalization Division
Yván Gil Pinto	Venezuela	Foreign Minister

CONDITIONS

This section deploys the original data collected for this chapter to evaluate the extent to which the six conditions of the NIEO “moment” can be detected in the context of the present conjuncture. Each of the following subsections focuses on one of these conditions, setting out the historical context that defined the original NIEO moment before turning to the analysis of the data. Together, they aim to support the argument set out in the introduction to this chapter — that the conditions are, in fact, ripe for such a moment — while qualifying its nature in order to help explain the fundamental differences between the G77’s successful efforts to enshrine the 1974 UN resolution and its successor effort to revive the NIEO spirit five decades later.

INTERREGNUM

Are we living through an interregnum in the international order? 50 years ago, both scholars and pundits were preoccupied with the same question. A series of political economic crises roiled through the multilateral system, upending its institutional architecture so radically that it “foreshadowed the end of a cycle of world history” (Cox 1994, 109). In 1971, a series of unilateral economic measures undertaken by the United States government delivered the “Nixon Shock” to the global economy, with the announcement that the United States would no longer respect the convertibility of its dollar to gold — rendering, effectively, the end of the post-war Bretton Woods settlement and setting off a series of currency crises as a result (Garten 2021). Two years later, in 1973, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) announced an oil embargo that spiked its global price by 300 percent (Baumgartner et al 1977) — and transformed the basic infrastructure of the global economy into a geopolitical “weapon” (Licklider 1988). The old arrangements of the post-war era were evidently “unraveling (Chang 2021) — both in the assertion of power by the world’s rising economies, as in the reaction of its dominant ones. The world was then, in the words of British historian Geoffrey Barraclough (1976), “waiting for the new order.”

Today, once again, scholars have warned that “the world is between orders; it is adrift” (Menon 2022). A spate of recent research across the fields of economics, political science, and international relations has focused on the decomposition of the so-called ‘liberal international order’ — its “crisis” (Flockhart 2020), its “rise and fall” (Mearsheimer 2019), or simply its

“end” (Ikenberry 2018). Just as 50 years ago, the combination of global economic crisis (James 2011) and the geopolitical frictions between rising powers such as China and dominant ones such as the United States has created a sense of suspension; Deutsche Bank (2020) has even warned of a coming ‘age of disorder’: “A clash of cultures and interests therefore beckons.” Donald Trump’s return to the White House has only reinforced the scholarly consensus that we have entered a “renegade order” (Brands 2025) in which the old rules no longer apply, and the new ones have yet to be written.

Has this scholarly consensus translated into the annals of the Group of 77? My interview data suggest that it has. One head of a G77 member-state stated the matter bluntly: “This is an interregnum,” he told me (RG), articulating both the opportunities and threats of the present conjuncture. “Imperialism” is weaker than ever — but its “talons”, he emphasized, are sharper. Others focused on ‘volatility vectors’ that may create even greater uncertainty in the global system that in the case of the interregnum five decades ago, citing Adam Tooze’s (2022) concept of the “polycrisis” to explain the rapid deterioration of the existing international order. In particular, interviewees emphasized the role of climate change in delivering repeated and escalating shocks to the international system that would require its wholesale reconstruction:

The conditions are all there. The breakdown of the system? Check. The arrival of Trump to oversee its destruction? Check. If you look at the so-called “polycrisis” — the unsustainable of debt, the failure of the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] — these are all the symptoms of the structural incoherence of the goals that we aspire to achieve and the reality of the conditions. (FK)

Yet the fact of the present interregnum begs the question of its nature — and how it compares to the 1970s crisis that preceded it. Here, we return to the definition of the NIEO moment developed in the sections above. Does the breakdown of the liberal international order give greater relevance to the nation-state as the key unit of global transformation? Fifty years ago, the neoliberal ‘revolution’ that precipitated the death of the original NIEO promised to shift permanently the axis of global economic governance. On the one hand, national borders would give way to transnational networks (Strange 1996), not just decentering but replacing the key unit of the nation-state with technocrats and transnational activists (Walzer 1995; Slaughter 1997; Keck and Sikkink 1999). On the other hand, international cooperation would give way to supranational institutions that would be charged with the construction of a frictionless global

economy for the transmission of goods and money (Slobodian 2018). That “dialectic of globalization” (Grewal 2018) would thus drive the transnational and supranational dimensions of global economic governance closer and closer together in a new dominant order. As one interviewee described it:

The problem was trans-nationalization. You once had national governments that may have been bourgeois, that came from privilege and from an elite — but they had a nationalistic approach to defending sovereignty. That was all trans-nationalized. All the leaders of governments came to think, dress, and like to feel like they are European, where they were all educated. And that changed their way of thinking. (CS)

Today, however, that dialectical process is unraveling in the course of the present interregnum. In the East, the rise and rise of the Chinese economy has reduced the unilateral powers of the United States to dictate the terms of global economy governance from its national capital (Schweller and Pu 2011; Layne 2012). And in the West, a new set of populist leaders is driving a globalization “backlash” is underway, seizing upon a mix of economic discontent (e.g. Autor et al. 2020) and cultural anxiety (e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2019) to undermine the very institutions that they once established to manage their interests at global scale. The onset of this “populist revolt” (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018) has disrupted the dynamics of hyperglobalization (Rodrik 2019) that dominated the past half-century of global economic governance: President Donald J. Trump broke with supranational institutions like the WTO just as Prime Minister Boris Johnson broke with that of the European Union. The result has been a shift away from the old Washington Consensus toward new nation-centered approaches (Mazzucato 2021).

My findings thus suggest both that the present conjuncture can be fairly described as an “interregnum,” and that this moment of ‘punctuated equilibrium’ (Stahl 2021) bears critical resemblance to the original NIEO moment. The confluence of crises — economic, political, climatic, and otherwise — is, for the member-states of the G77 creating an opening for a new project to take the place of a dying international order. As one Deputy Foreign Minister in a G77 member-state told me:

The level of contradiction in today’s world — and the absence of solution to the main problems that we have — are so great, that something dramatic needs to happen. And

if that is the case, then we [the G77] need to be ready with a blueprint, with an alternative, something for which we need to have dialogue and a level of common understanding. (CC)

ACTIVATION

Has the present interregnum thus activated the less developed nations as a coherent bloc? The original NIEO emerged from a long process of bloc activation. Nearly a decade before the foundation of the Group of 77, leaders from across Asia and Africa gathered in Indonesia on the premise of their shared experience of colonialism. “Our nations and countries are colonies no more,” said the host President Sukarno in his opening speech to the Bandung Conference in 1955. “Now we are free, sovereign and independent. We are again masters in our own house. We do not need to go to other continents to confer.” The simultaneous if differentiated experience of territorial decolonization thus allowed the participating nations to identify “common interests and concerns” in the much longer project of economic decolonization that would guide the Non-Aligned Movement born out of Bandung.

If the contemporaneous opponents of the original NIEO, like Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, sought actively to “divide these countries up,” the neoliberal revolution promised to push the very idea of a Southern coalition into an irrelevance. In 1977, the World Bank organized an Independent Commission on International Development Issues headed by the social-democratic German Chancellor Willy Brandt. Its findings were damning: the North and South, Brandt concluded, were divided by a developmental line that condemned the latter to poverty while it guaranteed the former prosperity. In the years that followed though, the three ‘-ations’ of the Washington Consensus, as Deputy Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summer called them — privatization, stabilization, and liberalization — promise to erode the Brandt Line and bring the world’s poor countries into the ranks of the prosperous. By the early 1990s, conventional wisdom held that “diversity and disparity rather than commonality and complementarity appeared to capture the essence of the new economic reality in the South” (Williams 1993).

Today, however, the Brandt Line remains intact (Lees 2021). In Figures 1 and 2 below, I use data from the UN Conference on Trade and Development to trace the Brandt Line for the fifty-

year period between 1970 to 2020, comparing GDP per capita measures between the Group of 77 and the countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The results in Figure 19 are striking: Against predictions of the Great Convergence (Baldwin 2018) of the Group of 77 nations with their former colonial adversaries, the disparity between them has only grown. If we separate China from the remaining members of the G77 (Figure 20), the disparity grows further still.

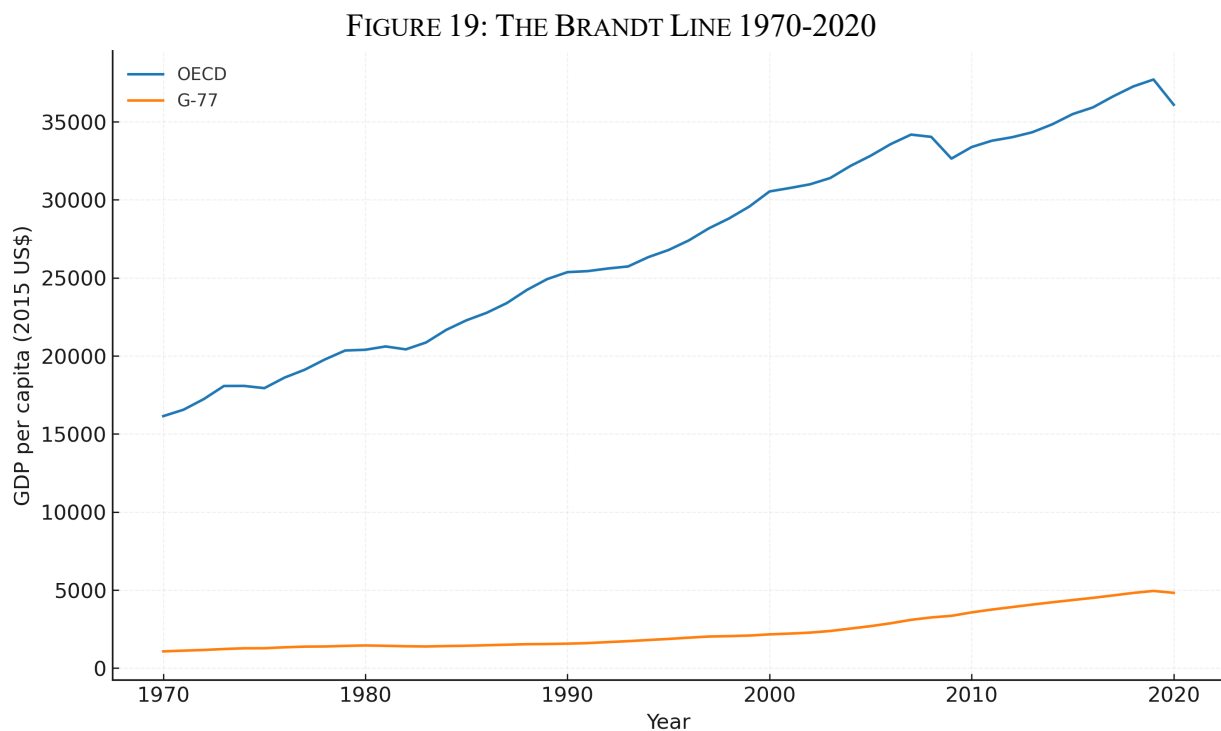
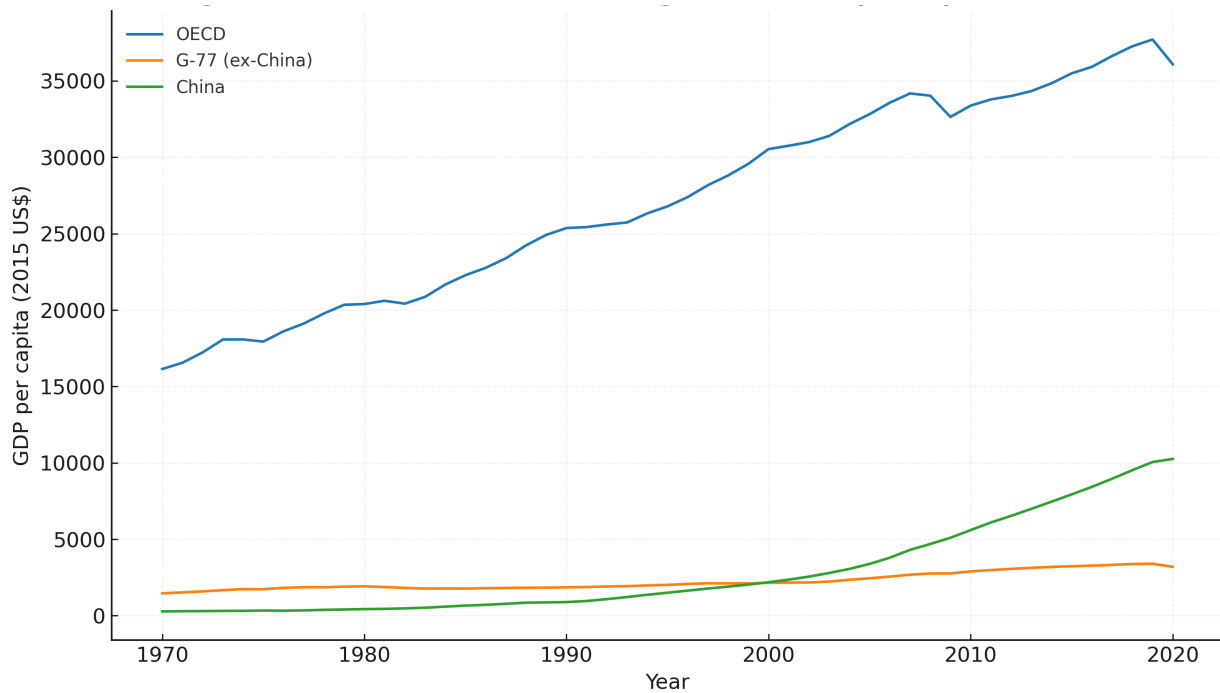


FIGURE 20: THE BRANDT LINE, EXCLUDING CHINA – 1970-2020



Yet the question remains whether the economic fault line between the North and South has today become politically activated. Back in 1981, the Third World Forum argued that accounts of Southern disparity were “increasingly used to undermine the solidarity of the Third World ... the heterogeneity of interests among developing countries is overemphasized and inflated by the North.” Today, once again, pundits and policymakers attempt to elide and erode the perception of common interests. “The ‘Global South is a pernicious term that needs to be retired,” reads a recent column in the *Financial Times* (2023), arguing that “arbitrarily dividing a complex world into simple blocs creates polarization and retards progress.” Another, more recent column from a former deputy director at the IMF warns that the concept of the Global South “fuels unrealistic expectations” (2025) — agreeing with the basic premise of the present interregnum as “the international order is being turned upside down,” but warning that an such coalition of less developed nations would “undermine its collective wellbeing and that of the majority of countries.”

The interviews conducted for this chapter, however, contradict this pessimistic account of South-South solidarity. Across a wide range of interviews, political representatives from the Group of 77 emphasized the ways in which the particular crises that have given rise to the

present interregnum that reactivated the North-South fault line — and reinvigorated what one interviewee described as a new “Southern consciousness.” Specifically, the interviewee data suggests the convergence of three main crises that activated the South, creating the conditions for a new NIEO moment.

The first is Covid-19. Interviewees cited the pandemic as a kind of global “earthquake” — the moment at which the interests of the North and South revealed themselves to operate in a zero-sum fashion: while the pandemic sent millions of people in the South into destitution, it “made millions for the North,” said one Foreign Minister from the G77 (CSL). Yet the experience of ‘vaccine apartheid’ also reminded many G77 policymakers that the North-South relationship cannot be measured in terms of GDP alone. The appeal for a temporary waiver on the TRIPS agreement — led by South Africa and India, later supported by the vast majority of G77 countries — pointed to a much broader agenda of trade, science, technology, and innovation that could unite the “disparate” nations of the Global South; its obstinate rejection by the governments of the Global North served to forge a new common sense about the “the basic convergence of interests” the Third World Forum cited a half-century ago. According to one South African diplomat interviewed for this chapter:

The Covid-19 nineteen pandemic not only created a sense of South-South solidarity, but it also exposed something deeply concerning about the multilateral system and generally the disposition towards of the Global North towards the Global South. You may recall when, South Africa had produced the capacity to check the virus and detail the trajectory of the virus, exactly how it's spreading, and we were even able to describe the new types of strains that the virus was mutating to. South Africa and the whole of the global south got punished. We ultimately saw countries of the Global North instituting travel bans on South Africa because it was able to describe exactly how this virus was mutating to the minute detail. And, basically, South Africa got punished for its scientific prowess... This enabled us to really galvanize a continent towards deepening our capacity to produce our own vaccines and ensure that we have the capacity to create the necessary vaccines here that could contain the virus as far as possible. But, of course, [the North] also saw this, which ultimately led to the TRIPS waiver itself not being granted... So what this revealed was both the prejudice about African health systems and the reluctance to even strengthen these health systems so that we're able to curtail all of these pandemics as they take place. (CP)

The second crisis is climate. In the interviews conducted for this chapter, G77 representatives cited both the zero-sum logic of carbon consumption and the hypocrisy of its politics. While the North bears responsibility for the explosion of carbon in the atmosphere, the South bears its most devastating consequences — including the risk of outright extinction for the most vulnerable small-island developing states. As the combined effects of drought, flood, and rising sea levels accumulate across the South, the recent UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP) — from Glasgow (2021) to Dubai (2023) — have thus seen the nations of the Group of 77 transcend the historic divide between its OPEC and non-OPEC members to push for Loss and Damage funding. As one Ambassador to the United Nations told me:

It's very easy to label some emerging economies, especially the Gulf states, as climate villains, but this is very unfair by countries with historic responsibilities who keep trying to scapegoat and deviate the attention away from themselves. The fact that Azerbaijan, Brazil and the UAE — where oil and gas is very important — are willing to host Cop, shows a commitment and willingness by those countries to do something multilaterally, at least they are not running away. (PP)

The third crisis is security. The proceedings at the Third South Summit were, in the words of one negotiator, “completely overshadowed” by the conflict in the Gaza Strip: points number six through 13 of its final declaration are dedicated to collective positions on the fate of the Palestinian people, while point five highlights the burning concern for the prospects of a “culture of peace.” G77 nations observed the complicity of their Northern neighbors in the repeated violation of international law against the Palestinian people. And through that observation, they experienced a premonition of their collective fate. As one head of state warned fellow member-states of the G77:

It is not the old dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is being shown today... What happens to Palestine can happen to any of you if you dare to make changes without their permission. (GP)

Together, these crises have reactivated many the original dimensions of the NIEO. For policymakers across the G77 today, the Brandt Line is not only an economic divide, but a legal, political, and even — amid rising sea levels and the escalation of hot war — an existential one.

If an NIEO moment requires less developed countries to recognize their position in that global hierarchy, then my evidence suggests that this second condition is present, and increasingly so. As one G77 diplomat announced to opening of the Third South Summit:

We are witnessing mounting frustration with, and the complete rejection of, an unjust world order which continually relegates the interests of the Global South to the margins of the international community's list of priorities. Now – more than ever – the G77 and all nations must come together and build bridges of dialogue, hope and cooperation to create a more fair, more just and more prosperous world for all. (DF)

ASPIRATION

If the present interregnum has activated a Southern consciousness, what is the aim toward which it aspires? In the days of Bandung, the leaders of the Third World were carried both by a set of common concerns and by a shared sense of their resolution: full decolonization. Each had passed through a phase of anti-colonial struggle, but recognized that formal independence was not enough to guarantee national sovereignty. As President Sukarno (1955) told the Asian and African delegates:

We are often told colonialism is dead. Let us not be deceived or even soothed by that. Colonialism has also its modern dress, in the form of economic control, intellectual control, actual physical control by a small but alien community within a nation. It is a skilful and determined enemy, and it appears in many guises. It does not give up its loot easily. Wherever, whenever and however it appears, colonialism is an evil thing, and one which must be eradicated from the earth.

Twenty years later, in the 1974 UN Declaration on the NIEO, the G77 reiterated this aspiration, citing “the remaining vestiges of alien and colonial domination, foreign occupation, racial discrimination, apartheid, and neocolonialism.” The decolonial aspiration thus served three critical functions for the original NIEO. First, it established a shared sense of fate across the Third World, uniting its disparate across ideological, ethnic, and religious lines. Second, it set a wide-ranging agenda for its leaders across all the issue areas of the NIEO, bringing a strong

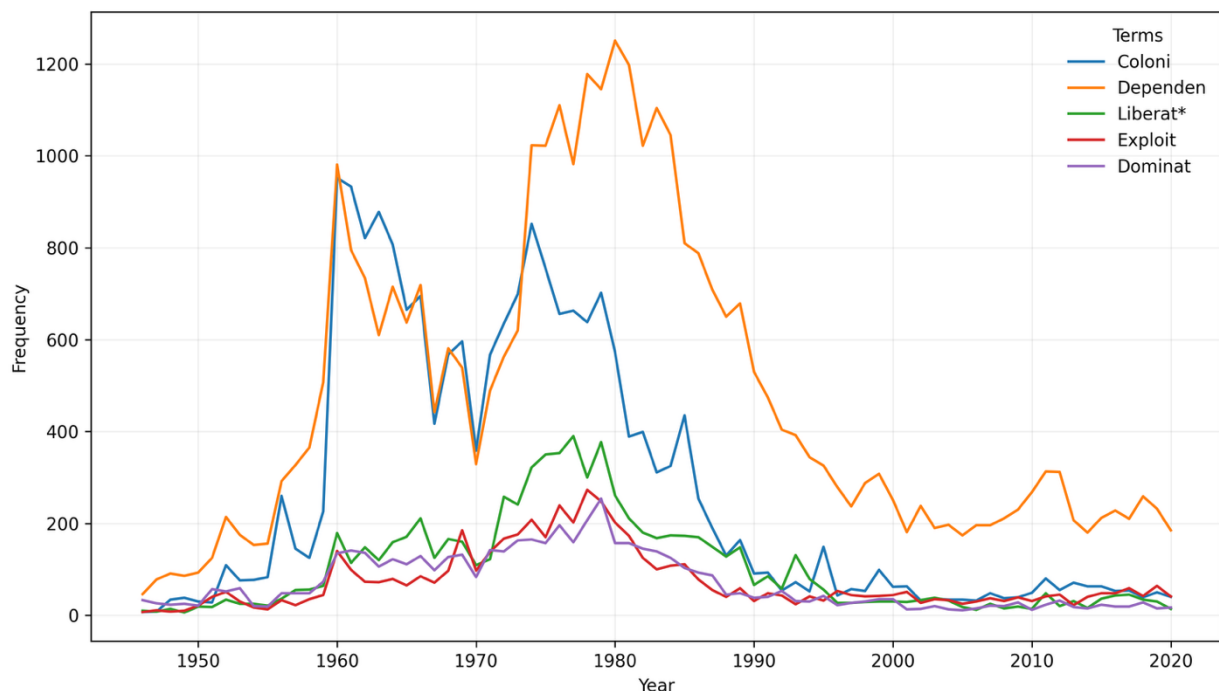
sense of ambition to the broader project. And third, it gave them a sense of authorship over the institutions that would govern the global economy, shifting away from a *reactive* posture of the anti-colonial struggle to a *proactive* role in the articulation of a new international order. Such a proactive aspiration — as I have argued in previous sections of this chapter — is what sets the NIEO apart from the accounts of great power competition and multipolar harmony that tend to dominate contemporary debates about the direction of the international order.

As the endurance of the Brandt Line illustrates, however, that project of decolonization today remains unfinished. The demands articulated in the course of the original NIEO were not heeded (Gilman 2015). And in the intervening half-century, the terms of structural adjustment only served to deepen — rather than diminish — the neo-colonial dynamics that drove the aspiration of the NIEO’s architects. Today, according to Development Finance International (2023), the “citizens of the Global South now face the worst debt crisis since global records began,” sustained by the lending practices of the International Monetary Fund that even its former chief economist Raghuram Rajan (2011) refers to as “a new form of financial colonialism.”

Amid the present interregnum, then, has the decolonial aspiration returned? To answer this question, I turn now to the data from the General Debate Corpus of the United Nations. The corpus, which contains the speeches of all G77 leaders at the September General Assembly, allows us to track the salience of this decolonization agenda through the full series from before the days of Bandung through the foundation of the G77 and on to the present. I code this data by membership of the Group of 77 as it has expanded over time from its original 77 members (coded as members through the beginning of the data set) to the full 134 nations today, accounting for entry and exit of countries like Mexico (entry 1965; departure 1995). I then identified five terms most associated with the decolonization aspiration: “coloni-”, to account for mentions of colonialism, anti-colonialism, neo-colonialism and decolonization; “dependen-”, to account for independence or dependency; “liberat-”, to account for national liberation, excluding the word “deliberation”; “exploit-”, to account for economic exploitation; and “dominat-”, to account for the concern for colonial domination set out in the original NIEO. I then run these key words through the corpus to examine their incidence in the debates of the General Assembly over time.

Figure 21 summarizes the salience of the decolonial agenda at the General Debate since 1946. The graph can be described in two parts. In the first, we can see the emergence of the decolonial vocabulary at the General Debate in the early days of the G77 — with a peak 50 years ago, at the height of the push for the New International Economic Order. In the second, we can see the terminal decline of these terms in the General Debate. With the exception of “dependen-” — which stagnates from the early 1990s forward — the remaining terms fall to near-zero incidence and remain there through the course of recent decades. In other words, despite the endurance of the structural conditions of neo-colonialism — and despite the emergent Southern consciousness that is visible in the actions and words of the G77 today — the decolonial aspiration appears to have disappeared, never to return.

FIGURE 21: THE DECOLONIAL AGENDA IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE, 1946-2020



If the decolonial aspiration has disappeared, what has replaced it? The previous section, grounded in the interview data collected for this article, provide some clues. In those interviews, G77 policymakers repeated a common anxiety about the present conjuncture: the possibility of the “fragmentation” of the multilateral system. By this account, the international order may be suspended in interregnum, but in the process, the more developed governments of the North may be better equipped to manage the uncertainties of that interregnum than those of the less developed South. As one UNCTAD representative told me, “The North was far more

heterogeneous — and therefore far weaker — than it is today.” The increasing integration of the Northern bloc, according to many of my interviewees, thus risks the possibility of a unilateral imposition of its interests against those of the South. Even if the South were to unite behind a common aspiration, one G77 representative told me, “The North is too dominant. You can win any General Assembly resolution, but once the North dissociates, it doesn’t matter.” Looking back to the General Debate Corpus, I can thus trace a very different discourse that is emerging in recent years: one that is *defensive* in posture, compared to the *offensive* one of the decolonial aspiration. I identify four terms associated with this aspiration to defend the multilateral system and the principles of “equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and cooperation among all States,” as set out on the 2022 resolution “Toward a new international economic order.” The first “multilateral-”, to account as well for multilateralism; the second is “governance-”, to account as well for global governance; the third is “consensus”; and the fourth is “protect-”, to account for protection amid this coming ‘age of disorder.’

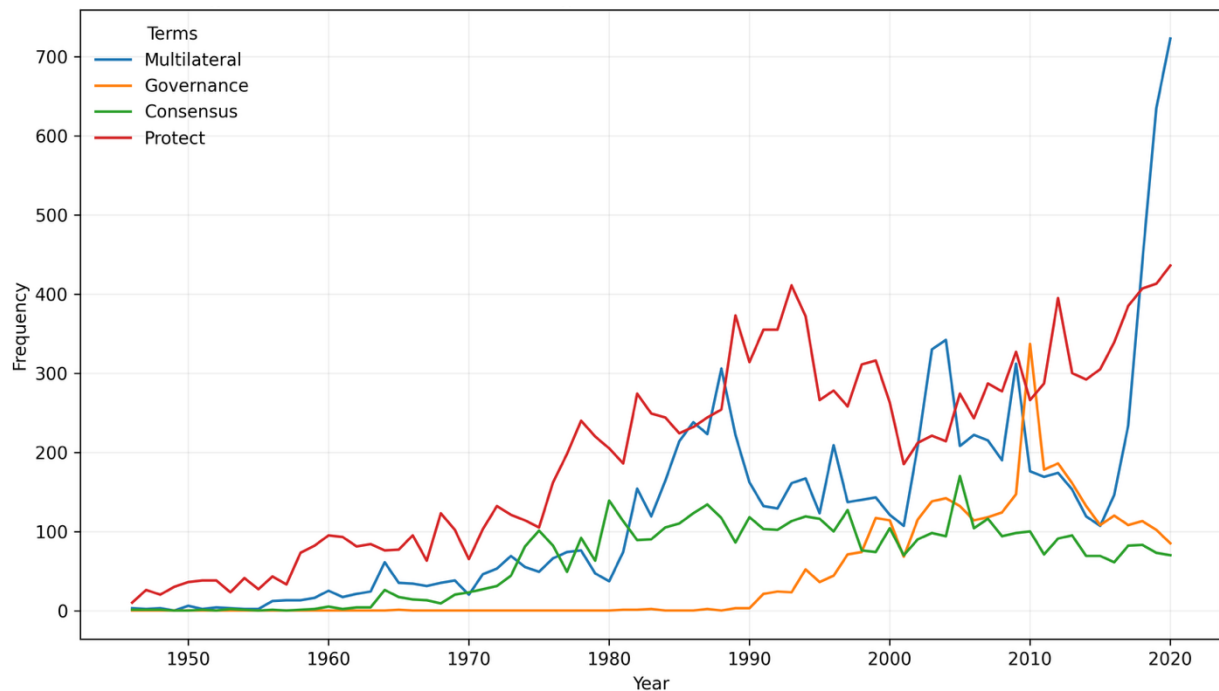
Figure 4 summarizes the salience of the new aspiration. The graph reveals two patterns. The first is the steady rise of terms like “consensus” and “protect” through the data set, as new priorities emerge across the G77 to stabilize the multilateral system. The second is the striking leap of salience of terms like “governance” and “multilateral,” the latter timed to the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic cited heavily in my interviews as a driver of the present Southern consciousness. Looking to the full text of the recent General Assembly speeches reveals this defensive anxiety in greater detail, such as President Lula da Silva of Brazil (2023):

We are a force that works towards fairer global trade in a context of a serious crisis in multilateralism... The principle on which multilateralism is based – that of sovereign equality between nations – has been eroding. At the main global governance levels, negotiations in which all countries have a voice and vote have lost momentum. When institutions reproduce inequalities, they are part of the problem, not the solution.

This text analysis helps to make sense of the emergent discourse on the “multipolarity” — which, along with dialogue and multilateralism, was defined as one of President Lula’s top foreign policy priorities. The “multipolar world” was cited frequently in the course of my interviews with G77 policymakers as a promising resolution to the present crisis of multilateralism. The analysis presented here suggests a defensive valence to this project: multipolarity not as a means to *transform the world* — as the decolonial aspiration once sought

to do — but rather as a mechanism of defense from the sharp “talons” of the Northern powers. As one G77 negotiator (FK) told me: “There is a lot of rhetoric of a good aspiration. But there is no theory of change that is rooted in a decolonial project.

FIGURE 22: THE MULTILATERAL AGENDA IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE, 1946-2020



COALITION

The previous section suggested that a common aspiration continues to motivate the Group of 77 — but that this ‘multilateralist’ aspiration is much thinner, weaker, and more reactive than the decolonial one that once animated the original NIEO. How is this shift related to the fate of the founding coalition? What can the data collected for this chapter tell us about the direction of the G77? And what do those internal dynamics tell us about the prospects for a new NIEO? Dominant accounts of the original NIEO’s demise tend to focus here: on the structural integrity of the international coalition convened to the Third World, and the existential pressures that it faced through the course of the 1970s. Concerns for the Third World coalition cut through the three main camps identified in the second section of this article. One emphasizes *division*: the determination of Northern powers to cleave through the coalition of the Third World through a mix of cooptation and coercion. Sargent (2015) calls this Kissinger’s “Southern strategy”, engaging with the G77 in order to defang it: “Our basic strategy must be to hold the

industrialized powers behind us and to split the Third World,” he explained to the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Another camp emphasizes *divergence*: for reasons of natural resource wealth or national security arrangements, the members of the Southern coalition drifted further and further apart (Frankema 2025). The third emphasizes *defection*: through coups, assassinations, and anti-communist crusades, individual members of the Third World coalition split away to align themselves openly with the First World powers (Prashad 2007).

None of these camps, however, can account for the “endurance” (Lees 2023) of the Group of 77 coalition. Against the conventional wisdom about its demise, I highlight a slew of studies — from the 1980s through to the present — that demonstrate the diplomatic integrity of the founding coalition of the NIEO. Iida (1988), for example, examines voting patterns of the G77 at the level of the UN General Assembly, measuring “defections” of its member-states from the Group’s position and showing that defection rates actually *fell* in the wake of the NIEO’s stated collapse in the 1980s — including among its OPEC members. Research in the following decades confirmed this finding. Kim and Russett (1996), for example, studying the Group of 77’s voting behavior in the post-Cold War period, found a “resurgence of North-South voting” at the United Nations, while more thematic scholarship on issues like trade and climate have similarly noted the strength of the Southern negotiating bloc even at the height of the neoliberal period (e.g. Hurrell and Narlikar 2006). More contemporary scholarship — from Seabra and Sanches (2018) and Lees (2023) — confirm this observation:

The North–South divide has endured despite repeated declarations about the death or irrelevance of the global South. The evidence provides a further corroboration of Iida’s argument that G77 consolidated itself as a coordinated voting bloc in the 1980s, well after the heyday of the demand for a New International Economic Order (Lees, 328).

The “endurance” of the G77 thus presents a puzzle to the scholarship on the NIEO. Even as the economies of the South drifted toward vastly different developmental coordinates — and even as the extraction of fossil fuels has enriched some at the risk of extinction for others — the coalition has continued to function as a voting bloc at the United Nations. “It is remarkable that the G77 has continued to exist,” one senior diplomat told me (CS). Lees (2023), for his part, explains this voting pattern by citing the “South-South ideology” that continues to carry the unity of the G77. Similar to Murphy’s (2019) earlier writings on the “Emergence of the NIEO Ideology,” Lees sees a distinct set of beliefs — grounded in an anti-colonial critique of the North, and a shared commitment to national sovereignty in the South — that motivate the common positions of the G77 even through the tumult of the previous half-century.

Based on both the interview and observational data collected for this article, I argue that the dominant approach to measuring the integrity of the G77 coalition is misleading. Specifically, I argue that a focus on the UN General Assembly fails to account for the underlying transformation in the *nature* of the G77 coalition over time — from a coalition that spans *country capitals* to one that is anchored in between *Geneva* and *New York*. My claim is a socio-political one: that over the course of the past half-century, the diplomatic corps of the G77 membership — often insulated in the separate political sphere of foreign service, with UN Ambassadors frequently outlasting the governments that appointed them — has drifted away from the national governments, making it nearly impossible to make sense of the true preferences of G77 governments from the discourse of its diplomats or the votes that they cast at the United Nations. While the former may well carry the legacy of the NIEO or South-South ideologies, the latter today articulate foreign policies that actively contract the aims of those ideologies — from military cooperation with the Global North to bilateral investment treaties with their finance ministries. Distinguishing between the socio-political dynamics that operate at the level of UN Ambassadors and those which operate between the cabinets in national capitals thus allows us to resolve the apparent contradiction between the accounts of the G77 coalition.

Interviews pointed to this dynamic as the key to making sense of the G77 and its evolution from the time of the original NIEO to the present. One former Chair of the G77 said:

There is an epistemic community of diplomats, but their prestige is disconnected from the national political dynamic... Diplomats today are very scornful of national changes in politics; they say, ‘We have been working on this for 40 years.’ (GL)

One former Central Banker from a G77 country said:

The G77 lives in a parallel universe. They have these nice ideas of a parallel world that does not exist, and that their achievement is the vote at the General Assembly that they celebrate, but it does not have an operative component. (AA)

Another former Chair of the G77 said:

One should understand the Group *not* as an intergovernmental group... The voting of the members of the group will be for solidarity, to have a united Group, even if they are not in agreement with certain policies... Everyone knows these are *not linked* to national politics. (SL)

Observations from the Third South Summit in Kampala confirmed this dynamic. Billed as a gathering of its ‘Heads of State’, the Summit managed to convene only two of 134 to arrive to Uganda to take part in its “supreme decision-making body” — one of them from the host country itself. Fieldwork at the Summit revealed that its primary participants had decamped directly from diplomatic positions in Geneva or New York to meet their colleagues again on the African continent. The vast majority of the G77 heads of state, meanwhile, “went to Davos”, as one negotiator told me in an interview:

[The World Economic Forum] is where the money is. They needed to meet with the presidents, prime ministers, and heads of the Bretton Woods institutions in order to get their debt rescheduled and their loans approved, their carbon markets financed... To go collect their crumbs. (FK)

The goal of this section has been to evaluate the extent to which a key condition of an NIEO moment — namely, a strong coalition that institutionalizes the pursuit of a the G77’s common project — is present today. The striking contrast between a deserted Third South Summit in service of a stronger World Economic Forum not only suggests that this coalition has significantly weakened since the days of the original NIEO; the above quotation helps to provide key insight as to why. In addition to the *political* factors that have undermined this

coalition — as governments in respective G77 capitals diverge on the basis of ideology — the pursuit of “crumbs” at Davos points to *structural* factors that have undermined this coalition: governments’ attention urgent developmental needs take precedence over their sentiments of solidarity, turning their attention away from fellow members of the South and back to supposed adversaries in the North. A one former minister in the G77 said, “it’s all about how to survive to the next month: cash flow, credit ratings, imports and exports” (AA).

Yet it is impossible to account for the weakness of the G77 coalition without additional attention to its institutional architecture. Interviews with staff members of its Secretariat revealed that its operations rely on an annual quota from G77 Members of just \$5,000 USD; according to these interviewees, many of the G77 Members fail to make even this meagre contribution. Meanwhile, they said, a rotating annual presidency pro-tempore guarantees that the G77 never takes root in any one of its individual member-states. The weakness of the institution is by design; one long-standing head of state in the G77 explained that “everyone from Nyerere to Chavez were convinced that a strong Secretariat would be co-opted by imperialism... and that’s why they didn’t build one” (RG). Yet the effect has been to restrict the coalition of the G77 — along with the norms and traditions that sustain it — to its diplomatic community: a cast of Ambassadors that travels between Summits, but which rarely touch down in their capitals to turn rhetoric into reality.

PROGRAM

Has the G77 articulated a program to advocate the interests of the world’s less developed nations? The original program of action for the New International Economic Order did not simply appear in the 1974 UN resolution. Rather, its proposal was developed across more than ten years of deliberations since the first UNCTAD meeting where the group was formed. Indeed, “one can go back as far as the abortive United Nations debates over the Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED) which took place in the early 1950s” (Gosovic and Ruggie 1976, 640); or one could go further, to look at the substantial role that Global South representatives played in the debates that shaped the international economic institutions at the Bretton Woods conference in 1944 (Helleiner 2014). The ultimate scope of the NIEO program was broad, ambitious, and detailed: the 1974 program of action includes

sections on industry, technology, natural resources, and development financing, among others. And the scale of the program was no less so: passed unanimously at the General Assembly, the program of action was intended to govern all global economic interactions across First, Second, and Third Worlds. However, their success is measured, that program formed the basis of enduring negotiations through the process of the so-called ‘North-South Dialogue’ and the Independent Commission on International Developmental Issues that followed. “At long last the countries of the world are coming seriously to grips with the growing material inequalities between a handful of affluent nations...and the scores of poor countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America which constitute the bulk of humanity but enjoy very little of the earth’s bounty,” wrote Iran’s Ambassador-at-large to the International Monetary Fund, Jahangir Amouzegar, in 1975.

Today, a new round of declarations, resolutions, and negotiating positions of the G77 suggest that a new NIEO program may be emerging once again. The 2024 UN Declaration "Towards a New International Economic Order", for example, points a programmatic agenda that runs across many the issue areas covered by the original NIEO, from UN reform to technology transfer. Some scholars have suggested that elite communication in fora like the UN are simply a means for shoring up support among domestic audiences (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2023), with stakes limited to the legitimation or de-legitimation of the international organizations in the eyes of their citizens (Debre and Dijkstra 2023; Uhlin and Verhaegen 2023). Yet the NIEO resolution is hardly a strong public signal; stemming from the closed-door deliberations of the UN Economic and Financial Committee, the resolution more likely reflects the shared ambitions of its Members in the areas of global economic governance. Moreover, the repetition of the NIEO resolution — in 2018 (A_RES_73_240), in 2020 (A_RES_75_225), and 2022 (A_RES_77_445) — would suggest a strong indication of real-world intention by its authors and voting Members.

Yet the emergent diplomatic consensus at the level of the United Nations has not translated into a common program of action among G77 member governments. On the contrary, the political dynamics at the national level of the G77 often run directly counter to the diplomatic consensus at the United Nations. Across the Global South today, a renewed and radicalized set of right-wing leaders are actively implementing policies of liberalization, privatization, and industrial *downgrading*; following the ouster of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, for example, the governments of Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro actively pursued policies that

inflamed the country's declining terms of trade (Ferrari and Henrique 2023). The result was an acute process of deindustrialization: "Not only primary commodities overcame manufacturers, but also...the level of complexity within the manufacturing sector has also reduced, with low-skill and technology-intensive products rising while high-skill and medium-skill decreased" (Cerioli 2022, 8). At the Third South Summit in Kampala, the widening discrepancy between the diplomatic consensus and the government policy often made for an awkward clash of perspectives. At the UNCTAD side event celebrating 60 years since the birth of the Conference, host President Yoweri Museveni delivered a lengthy keynote speech, which he concluded by declaring: "Protectionism destroy opportunities and distorts economies." It was little surprise that that in the interview I conducted with the senior UNCTAD official presiding over the side event, I was told bluntly: "There is no real agenda here" (RG).

The contradiction between the G77's diplomatic work at the level of the United Nations and the actually existing programs of its member-states can be resolved through the observation set out in the previous section. As one former G77 Chair said, "There is a schizophrenic relationship between what is said at the level of the G77 and what individual countries do in their local contexts" (SL). In some cases, that "schizophrenia" not only applies to different parts of the foreign policy apparatus, but to the very same individual diplomats. Another former G77 diplomat said:

What's fascinating is that you have these diplomats who play two roles — career diplomats who uphold the tradition of the 60s and 70s Third Worldism, but then they are also playing close to the US unipolar moment when they get home. (GL)

The latter encapsulates the defensive posture of the new NIEO moment — less the strident vision of free trade as "as essential for a prosperous and peaceful world order" (Palen 2024), and more the reflexive anxiety about the present convulsions of the global economy. But it also tells us something important about the differences between the past and present NIEO moments, and the institutional evolution that has taken place between them. Specifically, the half-century has seen the construction of a new set of transnational institutions — from global universities to tax havens — that disrupt the national-developmental coalition on which the original NIEO relied. As one interviewee described it:

National governments don't represent national interests. It's fine that they are from the global South, but they are right-wingers with double US citizenship, and they have an offshore company in Miami. The system has penetrated to the level where political leadership throughout the political spectrum in the Global South are perfectly articulated with the hegemonic system — so they lack interest and intention to change it. (AA)

One consequence of this secular rightward shift of the Southern ideological spectrum has been the *ideologization* of the NIEO program. 50 years ago, the decolonial aspiration and its attendant policy agenda cut across ideological lines in ways that united, however briefly, movements for socialism and capitalism as it did movements to preserve traditionalism and to pursue modernism. Today, as one interviewee said, “the NIEO agenda is perceived as left-wing” (SL). That perception, he explained, means that the space for programmatic consensus across the G77 has narrowed. Even as its representatives deliberate and advocate a common agenda at the level of the United Nations, G77 leaders in their respective capitals struggle to find areas of cooperation even within their own regional blocs (Adler and Long 2023). As one senior diplomat said,

To make the NIEO work, you need a total consensus. So if one of these government is waiting on the word of some corporation or the IMF for a final investment, and they say, this is going to jeopardize our investment, the government starts to derail, and you lose consensus. If you repeat that year by year, topic by topic, you begin to understand where we are. (CS)

Many scholars have observed the emergence of a new ‘non-alignment’ across the developing world (Sahay 2022; Murithi 2023; Rao 2023; Le Thu 2023). According to these accounts, poorer nations are once again forging a new, ‘third’ space to defend their independent interests between great powers. Yet the shrinking programmatic consensus among leaders of the G77 suggest a qualitative transformation in the nature of such geopolitical ‘fence-sitting’ (Spektor 2023). If the Third World once viewed non-alignment as a *transformative* project – transmitting to the world a set of shared principles, the “last call...to the moral consciousness of the West” (Wright 1995) — the absence of a clear and concrete program to guide the G77 means that the Global South today conceives of non-alignment primarily as a *transactional* one. Rather than seeking to advocate “in the interests of mankind as a whole,” the findings in this chapter suggest

that G77 members are pursuing their own interests at global scale, even as they band together in key moments of collective unity. As one Ugandan host described the purpose of the Third South Summit: “Now is our time to network.”

POWER

How much power, then, is present in the coalition of the world’s less developed nations? How capable is the Group of 77 to leverage its voice to achieve real change in the world? And what are the factors that most impact the Group’s structural power today, as compared to fifty years ago? Scholars of the original NIEO tend to agree that an essential condition for the passage of the UN Declaration was the deployment of the G77’s structural leverage — primarily through its natural resources (Garavini 2019). The push for the cartelization of bauxite, copper, and petroleum not only emphasized the central role of resource sovereignty in the NIEO program, but also provided them with bargaining power through the course of both the formal and informal North-South dialogues. It has become conventional wisdom that the division between the OPEC and “NOPEC” countries served to diminish the prospects for sustained South-South solidarity (Benjamin 2015). Yet even among observers at the time, it was clear that “OPEC’s solidarity in resisting Western political pressure during the 1972-73 boom, and its remarkable resilience in holding the oil price line in the face of falling demand during the 1974-75 economic recession, have given other raw-materials producing countries hope for more equitable arrangements with the industrial world” (Ahmuzegar 1975).

The prospects for a new NIEO moment then depend both on the discovery of similar sources of structural leverage — and the ability to transcend the political pitfalls that came with the resource cleavage of the 1970s. The principal finding of this section, however, is that the appetite and ability for resource cartelization is nearly non-existent today. In a wide range of interviews, respondents told me that, despite renewed attention to question of South-South cooperation (Gray and Gills 2016), the capacity for collective action by the world’s developing nations remains severely limited. As one senior negotiator told me:

When you talk to ministers, they love the idea of collective action. But then they need to take the next step. So a minister of energy needs to go back to the cabinet and have a conversation with the entire cabinet. And the cabinet needs to start convening

conversations with neighboring countries to think about joint industrial policies. But most ministers either do not have the capital to do this — they fear that their presidents are going to raise red flags for the Americans — or they are too busy fighting little fires, because they have been stuck in firefighting mode, and they see this as something way too long term. Maybe you get one leader that will agree to this, but where is the coalition? There is a geopolitical situation here. These countries do feel very vulnerable. They feel like they are at risk of a coup, or an assassination, or the destabilization of their country. So that engenders a lot of conservative thinking. (FK)

Unpacking this quotation returns us to the three dimensions articulated in the literature on the original NIEO's demise — each of which plays a role in explaining the absence of power through processes of cartelization and collective action in the G77 today. The first draws our attention beyond the bloc itself — and to the Northern powers arrayed against it. One of the primary structural transformations in the North-South relationship during the past half-century has been the shift away from the former's resource dependence on the latter, drastically reducing the appeal — and the political force — of cartelization. As one senior diplomat said:

Unity at the end of the 70s worked through the approval of the 'global negotiations', which relied on the cartel power of OPEC. You got the North to sit down and implement the outcomes of the North-South Dialogue. When oil was found — and started to be produced in places like Britain and Norway — they were able to escape the structural power of the OPEC countries. (CC)

That trend has only accelerated in the decades since. The 'shale boom' in the United States has meant a radical reversal in the terms of trade between the G77 and the OECD, with the US becoming a net exporter of primary commodities to the Global South in the past decade alone (UNCTAD 2024). As one G77 negotiator put it simply: "They don't need our oil." Meanwhile, the less developing nations remain critically reliant on their more developed neighbors for investment, infrastructure, and technology to conduct exploration for the critical minerals over which they once sought 'permanent sovereignty' in the original NIEO. "In terms of critical minerals," one G77 negotiator said, "the South today is like OPEC before OPEC: dependent on developed countries for extraction and refinement." At the Kampala Summit, many interviewees cited Uganda's recent discovery of oil as a source of excitement for the new development prospects across the whole of Africa — but lamented the fact that the Ugandan

government felt compelled to lease its land to the French multinational TotalEnergies in order to explore it, failing in its negotiations over upgrading and refining to keep additional revenue inside the country.

The barriers to collective action are also political in nature. Just as fifty years ago, the Global North deploys a variety of tactics to sustain their dominance against a rising South:

There is obstruction, blocking and vetoing; there is cooptation, as when they agreed to set up a Loss and Damage Fund but retained full control over it by bringing the Fund into the World Bank; and there is deconstruction, when they buy off certain members of the G77 to the exclusion of others. (YL)

Yet the opportunities to exert collective power are also squandered politically according to an endogenous logic of the South itself. One interviewee explained this to me through a reference to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its annual Conference of Parties (COP) when states across the world negotiate the future of global climate governance:

At COP, Global South countries don't send ministers of environment or foreign ministers to negotiate. The US and Europeans do send high-level diplomats to negotiate with clear mandates from their presidents. But we send mid-level diplomats and leave them in the lion's den — for a very clear reason: because they do not want to have ministers from the Global South facing off with the Germans or the French, and then two weeks later, going to ask them for financial assistance and funding... So they send the mid-level diplomats — and maybe give them a minister title — but at the last minute, like at Baku, when things stall the capitals call to tell their representatives to quiet down. And then if there is a big challenge — from India, or from Nigeria — it's after the gavel has already struck, and there is nothing that can be done. (FK)

The second dimension thus comes from inside the bloc itself — both in the threats presented by tensions between its members, as well as the unique opportunities presented by the meteoric rise of the G77's "natural ally" China. In Latin America, for example, the process of political polarization between its left- and right-wing parties has meant that the "continent is in permanent dispute," as one former G77 Chair from the region described it (SL). This has

created additional openings for Northern powers to intervene in the region; as he continued, “it’s very revealing that the United States made its military Southern Command the voice of mineral governance in the region.” Amid such internal tensions, it is little surprise that many countries in Latin America — as across the G77 — have individually turned toward its external supporter China to address the development challenges that it once aimed to resolve through the exercise of collective leverage. Throughout my interviews, G77 policymakers cited the rise of China as the key to fostering a new NIEO moment — both for China’s raw structural power to break the unipolar order led by the United States, as well as for its leadership of initiatives like the BRICS that serve to create a parallel system of global economic governance.

One interviewee said:

The presence of China creates alternative routes, alternative channels of communication. It opens the creativity, and the mind of Southern countries... It shows that the development agenda does not have to be tied to the ‘universal values’ of liberal democracy, and that you can reach development through other paths as well. (AA)

Another said:

We are definitely in a new NIEO moment... But this change is not going to come through the General Assembly... You need to see this change through the BRICS: That’s where we see the NIEO emerging. It’s in arenas that do not include the United States. (SL)

For many members of the G77, then, the question of power can be resolved through the presence of China “as a developing country and a member of the Global South,” as the representative of the People’s Republic of China emphasized in his presentation to the Third South Summit in Kampala. Yet the nature of that power — realized primarily through bilateral engagements with China and development initiatives such as the Belt and Road — is categorically distinct from that of the collective power exercised by OPEC in the 1970s.

Finally, the capacity of less developed nations to realize their collective power is constrained by domestic conditions. From the cascading sovereign debt crisis (UNCTAD 2025) to the escalating environmental one (Riofrancos 2025), developing countries today struggle to find the political and economic resources to exit the poverty traps laid before them. The ‘polycrisis’,

through this lens, primarily acts to distract Southern leaders from broader ambitions; as one G77 head of state said, governing today is like “walking up a down escalator” (RG). Yet it is not only these worsening structural conditions that set the present conjuncture apart from the NIEO moment of the past. Over the last half-century, powerful lobbies have grown in developing nations with the political connections to obstruct any efforts to transform resource management. One former Chilean diplomat described an “active and concerted” campaign to block his efforts toward resource cartelization while in power:

We had the idea of pushing forward the lithium triangle as a way to articulate Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and then Mexico in a coalition around lithium. But when we pushed this agenda, the right-wing in Chile immediately considered that to be a proposal to abandon free trade. This is something very ideological in Chile — the right-wing in this country is highly ordoliberal. The business associations and right-wing deputies developed a strategy to counteract with a line about protecting free trade. (JMA)

The prospects for realizing the collective power of the less developed nations can therefore not be separated from the actually existing political conditions in which its policy entrepreneurs operate. Above and against the diplomatic efforts to advance a new NIEO program at the level of the United Nations, new powerful actors have eroded the domestic prospects for that program to take root — and all but foreclosed the possibility to realize the foundational dream of the original NIEO to achieve “permanent sovereignty of every State over its natural resources and all economic activities” (A/79/439 2024).

DISCUSSION

Many eulogies have been written for the New International Economic Order. Scholars have etched “epitaphs for a monument to a failed protest” (Rothstein 1988); US Presidents have declared the end of the NIEO’s pursuit of “new institutions” (Reagan 1981); by the twenty-first century, the project had been declared dead and “almost completely forgotten” (Gilman 2015). This chapter began from the premise that the NIEO may have never died, but rather — as a vision to redress the enduring inequalities across the North-South divide — merely remained dormant. Not only do the speeches, declarations, and proposals of the original NIEO appear increasingly relevant in the present “polycrisis” (Tooze 2022); the original architects in the Group of 77 are today returning to them as a source of active inspiration.

To help make sense of these empirical developments, this chapter developed a novel theoretical framework to define an NIEO “moment” and the six conditions that comprise it. Where existing scholarship has focused largely on accounting for the ‘failure’ of the original NIEO in the 1970s, the framework aimed to revisit the social, economic, and political factors that made such a project feasible in the first place. In doing so, I aimed to derive a set of expectations for the present conditions under which political entrepreneurs operating across the developing world might successfully resurrect the NIEO’s effort to renovate the architecture of global economic governance.

Drawing from three sources of data — the UN General Debate Corpus, original interviews with G77 policymakers, and participant observations from the Third South Summit — I have argued that the conditions are ripe today for a new NIEO moment: the old order is in an advanced state of decay, and the governments of the South have collectively “discovered” its weakness (Polanyi 1944). Applying the concepts from the theoretical framework of this chapter, I have argued more specifically that the present conjuncture satisfies two critical conditions for the NIEO moment. We are not only living through an *interregnum* in the world system — caught “between orders” (Menon 2022) — but the less developed nations have also been *activated* toward a renewed sense of solidarity, purpose, and common interest in the construction of the new one.

Nonetheless, while these conditions have enabled the South to coalesce as a bloc *in* itself, the G77 as yet lacks a shared aspiration to enable it to act *for* itself. Where decolonial agenda of the original NIEO buttressed the coalition of the Third World to advance a transformative vision for the international order, the disappearance of its original aspiration has shifted the Global South from a proactive posture — seeking to shape a new world — to a reactive one, bargaining for individual nation-states particular interests with dominant powers outside of the bloc rather than seeking to build power from within it. Returning again to the conditions set out in this chapter’s framework, I have argued that the loss of the guiding aspiration of the original NIEO has accompanied the erosion of *coalition*, the erasure of its common *program*, and the inability to activate the instruments that would grant to it the structural *power* necessary to overhaul the system of global economic governance. The result has been what I have called a ‘Zombie NIEO,’ resurrected from the dead but unable to find its footing to maneuver in a concerted, careful way for the fights ahead.

My analysis suggests, however, that this story may not yet be finished. Against the competing accounts of great power competition and a multipolar world, my findings point to the sustained contention of the world's less developed nations for a place in the international order to come — even if they, as yet, have not converged on the program that will guarantee it. The combination of crises that presently afflicts the Global South promise only to intensify in the years to come; my findings suggest, then, that we should only expect these dynamics of contention to intensify as a result, both through and beyond the confines of the Group of 77.

This chapter thus set out to make three main contributions. First, I aimed to provide the theoretical tools to make sense of the NIEO as a living project — to provide the first tractable definition for its “moment,” as well as a set of conditions for scholars of international political economy to assess its prospects in the years to come. Second, I aimed to introduce original data to support that assessment, both examining the empirical conditions that comprise the NIEO moment as well the nature of their interactions over time. Third, in doing so, I aimed to point toward a new research agenda on the evolving politics and practice of non-alignment in the twenty-first century, as governments across the Global South manage both the threats and opportunities of the ongoing interregnum.

Building out from this chapter's analysis of the G77, for example, future scholarship can examine how institutions such as the BRICS, CELAC, and ASEA succeed or fail to supplant the existing institutions of global economic governance to deliver on the original promise of the NIEO in creating the conditions for a more just and equitable economic order. In addition, future scholarship could focus on the dynamics outside the formal constraints of the G77 bloc, examining how greater powers such as the United States and China actively aid or impede the efforts of less developed nations to advocate for their collective interests. Together, the emergent field of studies in the ‘new non-alignment’ (Sahay 2022) can shed light on the prospects for international coordination to stave off the most dangerous forms of geopolitical fragmentation that menace peace and prosperity in the world system.

5.

CONCLUSION

In September 2005, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair took the stage at the Labour Party conference to set out a vision for his country and its place in the global order at large. “I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalization,” Blair said. “You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer.” Blair’s speech brimmed not only with confidence about the general direction of globalization, but also about the rules that would govern it. “There is no mystery,” he continued in his conference speech, “about what works: an open, liberal economy, prepared constantly to change to remain competitive. The new world rewards those who are open to it.”

Just one decade later, however — as I cited in the opening of a previous chapter in this dissertation — Blair was warning that the seasons may be moving in reverse, as the “process of globalization [had come] under attack” (2016). Globalization, according to this account, was suffering an existential backlash (Ferguson 2016) that risked the return of international anarchy (Slaughter 2017). After a half-century of galloping international integration, new political forces threatened de-globalization (Kornprobst and Paul 2021) and a new international disorder (Innerarity 2016). If policymakers could once rely on simple recipes to reap rewards from the global economy, the onset of the polycrisis (Tooze 2022) and the accompanying interregnum (Stahl 2019) meant not only that the recipes would need to be rewritten. It also reopened the question of who would write them.

The three essays of this dissertation have sought to grapple with the political dynamics that have both contributed to the collapse of the existing international order (Mearsheimer 2019), and may point the way to its reconstruction. I have called these the ‘new politics of globalization’: the contest over the terms and conditions of international integration at a time of rapid geopolitical turbulence. Across these three essays, I have examined those dynamics at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, both picking up on and pushing back against conventional accounts of the ways in which voters, their representative institutions, and their governing nation-states bargain over the direction of the international order, respectively.

The goal of this multi-level research project has been to generate a more holistic account of the preferences, interests, and overarching visions that may guide the system of global governance out of its present interregnum. Such an approach has not only required me to examine the behavior of different actors, ranging from voters in advanced democracies to global non-governmental organizations to Southern governments in the Group of 77. It has also meant the application of diverse methods, combining national surveys, detailed case studies, and participant observation in order to help capture their political dynamics. The overall aim has been to yield theoretical tools and empirical insights that are relevant across academic fields such as political science and international relations, as well as to policymakers and political representatives who are actively engaged in efforts to rescue the multilateral system from ruin.

In this concluding chapter, I aim to synthesize those insights and their implications for the study of the new politics of globalization. I divide the chapter in four parts. In the next section, I offer a brief summary of the key empirical findings of the three chapters of this dissertation, and the ways they support, challenge, or renovate the broader theories of voter behavior, global civil society, and the changing global order, respectively. In the third section, I articulate the diverse contributions that this dissertation set out to make for both scholars and practitioners in the field of international politics. In the fourth section, I reflect on the limitations of this dissertation's research, attempting to identify the ways in which both my data and my methodological approach may constrain the conclusions that we can draw for the study of the new politics of globalization. Finally, in the fifth section, I set out potential directions for future research that can both build from the findings of this dissertation and redress their limitations.

FINDINGS

What are the key findings of the three essays in this dissertation? How do they individually relate to the central debates across fields of sociology, political science, and international relations? And how do they collectively form a more holistic account of the new politics of globalization? In what follows, I summarize the motivation, the methods and the key findings from each of the three essays that comprise the broader dissertation.

MICRO

I began the dissertation by looking at the micro-level dynamics of voter behavior. The rapid rise of ‘populist’ (Mudde 2016) parties across advanced democracies has once again drawn attention to drivers of popular discontent with and its distribution across the voting population. More specifically, the twin earthquakes of Britain’s referendum on membership of the European Union and Donald Trump’s election to the US presidency — considered to have unleashed the “backlash” against globalization (Ferguson 2016, Rodrik 2017, Walter 2021) — have sparked a major scholarly debate about the demand-side sources of ‘anti-system’ politics (Hopkin 2020), ranging from economic accounts of trade shocks (e.g. Autor et al. 2016) and wealth inequality (e.g. Adler and Ansell 2020) to cultural accounts of racial resentment (Hays et al. 2019) and anxieties over ‘progressive’ cultural codes (Norris and Inglehart 2016).

The first essay of this dissertation began from a simple premise: What is the “globalization backlash”? Should we really understand voters in advanced democracies like the United States and the United Kingdom to be “anti-globalization”, as the conventional wisdom holds? And if not, how might we reconceptualize the backlash with a more accurate understanding of the views, attitudes, and preferences that these voters actually hold? My motivation in answering these questions was both empirical and theoretical. Empirically, the existing literature on the backlash is highly ambiguous about its existence, its consistency, and its intensity (Walter 2021), calling for the collection of new and updated data, and a more extensive descriptive portrait of voter attitudes. Theoretically, my investigation aimed to make sense of the extent to which voters are really to blame for the rise of globalization-skeptic parties — or whether the actually existing backlash may be better understood as a largely supply-side phenomenon.

The descriptive findings of the first empirical chapter — derived from original surveys that I conducted in two key heartlands of the backlash, the US and the UK — are striking. Against the conventional wisdom of a widespread backlash against globalization, I find that voters in the overwhelmingly call for *greater* international engagement on key issues such as health, the environment, and the economy. Where the backlash thesis would expect voters to report a shift of attitudes *away* from these positions, I find the opposite: by and large, voters perceive themselves to be moving toward a preference for *stronger* support for international engagement by their governments. Such a preference does not preclude criticism of international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization. On the contrary, my findings suggest that voters are indeed becoming more critical of their function and operation. Yet the key descriptive finding of this chapter is that this criticism does not necessarily translate into a preference for their

disintegration; by and large, voters call instead to remake these institutions, either reforming them from the inside or finding novel ways to pursue their multilateral missions beyond their present limits. Rather than calling the collapse of the international order as such, I find, voters are calling for its democratization, seeking to redistribute the power over the terms and conditions of globalization back to citizens and communities themselves.

The chapter then turned to a brief analysis of the potential mechanisms that may link support for disintegration or reintegration in these crucial contexts. The findings there strengthen the case for a supply-side approach to the globalization backlash: across both the United States and the United Kingdom, I find that identification with right-populist parties is highly correlated with opposition to international organizations and international engagement more broadly — particularly in areas such as the environment, where those parties have adopted salient denialist stances (Antonio and Brulle 2016). Yet these effects may be partially offset by other personal attributes and experiences. My regression analysis suggests, for example, that age is closely correlated with support for international engagement on the issue of health, which may be related to the timing of the survey in September 2021, when the Covid-19 pandemic threatened the elderly far more than any other demographic. Taken together, the regression analyses presented in the first chapter of this dissertation cut against primarily cultural, or ‘post-materialist’ (Inglehart 1981) accounts of globalization preferences, calling for closer attention to the ways in which wealth and income shape voters’ attitudes toward the international system and the precise place of countries like the United States in it.

MESO

In the second essay of the dissertation, I move from the micro level of voter preferences to the meso level of representative institutions. How do the attitudes and anxieties bubbling up from the demand-side of democratic politics find expression in the supply-side institutions charged with transmitting them into the system of globalization? Over the past half-century, scholars have documented the displacement of political parties in the representation of voter attitudes toward globalization through the articulation of new transnational networks (e.g. Keck and Sikkink 1998) and social movements (e.g. Tarrow 2011) that have formed to challenge the institutions of global governance directly, marking the steady increase in these non-governmental organizations (NGOs) over time. Meanwhile, scholars have documented the “opening up” (Tallberg et al. 2013) of those institutions to allow for greater voice and participation of these NGOs as a key stakeholder in the

system of globalization. As new communications technologies facilitated the emergence of a ‘global’ civil society (Kaldor 2003) — scaling up and out from the domestic ones once considered central to the story of democratization at the national level (Habermas 1992) — so NGOs came to be seen as central to a more democratic form of globalization: “the true guardians of democracy and good governance everywhere” (Annan 1998).

The second essay of this dissertation, like the first, thus began by revisiting the conventional wisdom on these meso-level dynamics. What is the role of NGOs in the politics of globalization? How has that role evolved alongside both the maturation of global civil society and the transformation of the political opportunity structure for its engagement with the institutions of global governance? And what can that process of evolution tell us about the prospects for NGOs to drive the democratization for which voters appear, in the previous chapter, to be calling? To answer these questions, I developed a detailed case study of Amnesty International, one the largest, oldest, and most prestigious NGOs in the world. My goal was to use Amnesty as a theory-generative case, taking advantage of its longevity, visibility, and purported representativity to examine the longer-term evolution of its internal practices and external engagements since its foundation six decades ago.

The key finding of this chapter was that Amnesty’s evolution has seen a gradual process of disconnection from the global civil society out of which it once grew — a process that, I show, closely mirrors the evolution of party systems first described by Katz and Mair (1995). Marshalling original data from internal documents and semi-structured interviews with a wide range of Amnesty staff and volunteers, I document a series of shifts in its organizational form and function: from a *cadre* NGO that relied on the strength of its convictions and the personal networks of its founders; to a *mass* NGO that relied on the donations of its global membership and the labor of its volunteers; to a *catch-all* NGO that concentrated power in its professional staff while diluting its founding mandate; and finally to a *cartel* NGO that actively disempowered the membership of its global ‘movement’ to refocus its efforts on capital-intensive campaigns to carve out greater access and influence in the annals of policymaking. I use the case study of Amnesty to develop this theory of the cartel NGO across its seven key dimensions — Membership, Structure, Financing, Agenda, Campaigns, Leadership, and Legitimation — and to document the full extent to which the organization has evolved away from its founding mandate to establish and maintain a dominant position in the broader ecosystem of NGOs.

The findings of the case study point to three different types of meso-level dynamics that shape the trajectory of NGO cartelization. The first type are the dynamics *within* the NGO itself; in the case

of Amnesty, my findings illustrate the complex and often contradictory patterns of its internal development: both broadening its mandate through “forum multiplication” (Allan 2020) to include new issues like climate and racial justice, while limiting its engagement with each of these issues to superficial forms of ‘clicktivist’ petitions and donation drives; or growing its global base of membership from a small cadre in central London to millions of supporters organized in chapters across the world, while centralizing agenda-setting power and organizational decision-making upward into its executive offices. The second type are the dynamics *between* NGOs operating in its organizational ecosystem; in the case study, I document the formation of NGO cartels that bring together the ‘Big’ NGOs (BINGOs) like Amnesty and box out their competitors, facilitated by expensive new third-party data trafficking companies that trade financial profiles of relevant donors. And the third type are the dynamics located *beyond* the NGO ecosystem and into its interactions with the public institutions it seeks to influence; the findings of my case study document the shift from a dynamic of contention — battling against those institutions in service of its founding mandate — to one of symbiosis, with Amnesty gaining legitimacy by illustrating its access and influence, and its government interlocutors gaining legitimacy by illustrating its engagement with civil society actors. Across all three, I aim to show how global civil society — not as an abstract political space, but as an actor that has matured through the course of a half-century of globalization — has been stripped of the political force once assigned to it by scholars like Held (1995), Castells (1999), and Kaldor (2003) by the increasing self-service and survivalist ethos of the NGOs that were once founded to represent it.

MACRO

In the third essay of the dissertation, I turned to the macro-level contest over the future of the international order with an in-depth case study of the Group of 77, the coordinating body for 134 governments of the Global South. Many scholars have warned of a coming fragmentation in the international order (Allison 2017), as the centrifugal forces of great power competition risk the return of anarchy to the international system (Slaughter 2017). Such a pessimistic set of predictions, however, overlook actually existing efforts to reconstruct the system of globalization and the common rules of engagement it once promised. The third essay of this dissertation focuses on one such effort in the so-called ‘New International Economic Order,’ and the efforts of the G77 to revive its proposals — once considered “dead” (Mitchell 1993) and “almost completely forgotten” (Gilman 2015) — through the United Nations and beyond. How do the governments of the G77 coordinate to develop such a vision? How do they contest with forces outside the Southern bloc to

advance it? And what can these macro-level dynamics tell us about the prospects for a more just and egalitarian international order to emerge from the present conjuncture of high geopolitical turbulence?

The main finding of the essay is that the NIEO is far from dead; on the contrary, in documenting the endurance of the Group of 77 — and the structural conditions of North-South inequality that once motivated its formation — I argue that the NIEO never really died as a project to guide the macro-level ambitions of less developed nations. The findings of my research suggest, however, that we should understand that project today as a kind of ‘Zombie’ NIEO, staggering where the original vision — articulated at the high point of the Third Worldist movement (Prashad 2007) — once swaggered. Through a mixed-method approach that combined text analysis of the UN General Debate corpus, elite semi-structured interviews with G77 representatives, and participant observation in its Third South Summit, I find that the conditions are ripe for an NIEO ‘moment’ today, not only in the passage of the international order into a period of interregnum (Stahl 2019), but also in the activation of the Southern bloc to recognize their common interests and concerns in leading the international community out of it. Despite such rising sentiments of South-South solidarities, however, I show the G77 has failed to recover a common aspiration, with the UN corpus revealing the steady disappearance of the decolonization agenda from the G77’s discourse, only to be replaced by a reactive defense of the existing multilateral system.

To explain such a process of ‘Zombification’, the chapter deploys a mix of interview and observational data to document the transformation of the G77 coalition. Over the past half-century, I show, the axis of the G77 has shifted away from country capitals and toward the closed spaces of international diplomacy. While the practice of Southern solidarity may have survived in those spaces — sustained through a Third Worldist *esprit de corps* that has outlived the Third World itself — the practice of individual G77 member-states has become increasingly transactional, less interested in forging a new international order than in maneuvering as deftly as possible through its disorder. Where Southern countries once came together to build resource cartels that would leverage their collective power, today I document that absence of such efforts to exercise the kind of leverage that would be necessary to reconstruct the international order in the South’s image. I find, in other words, that while the South has increasingly coalesced as a bloc *in itself* — aware of institutional bias set against its interests in the system of global governance — the South is as yet unable and unwilling to act *for itself* to guide the international order out of its present interregnum.

CONTRIBUTIONS

What are the contributions that this dissertation has aimed to make to our understanding of the new politics of globalization? In what follows, I look at three kinds of contribution, and the way each essay contributed respectively. These are *empirical* contributions, or the ways in which the original data collected for this dissertation can help to inform future research; *theoretical* contributions, or the ways in which the novel theoretical frameworks generated for this dissertation can provide powerful tools to researchers in the fields of political science, sociology, and international relations; and *practical* contributions, or the ways that the findings of this dissertation can help to inform the key policy debates that preoccupy legislators across the world.

EMPIRICAL

I begin with the empirical contributions of the first essay of the dissertation. Existing research on voter attitudes to globalization has been constrained by the empirical limitations of its data. More specifically, I have argued that prevailing accounts of the globalization backlash have either relied on outdated data from sources like the International Social Survey (Walter 2021) — which predate the populist ‘revolt’ (Goodhart 2017) credited with unleashing the backlash — or deployed experimental data that force hypothetical trade-offs which limit our understanding of voter preferences over globalization (*see* Naoi 2020). The design of the original surveys that I conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States aimed to redress these empirical limitations. Both by querying a greater diversity of preferences and providing for greater complexity in their expression, the survey data allowed for a more nuanced portrait of the views and attitudes that voters in these two key heartlands of populist backlash may hold about the terms, conditions, and direction of globalization.

The second essay of the dissertation similarly sought to redress data limitations to our understanding of meso-level dynamics of voter representation. Existing scholarship on NGOs has tended to focus on the sites of competition (e.g. Ron and Cooley 2002) and contestation (Tallberg et al. 2013) in the sphere of global governance. My semi-structured interviews sought instead to get inside of these NGOs themselves, opening the black box of its internal governance by speaking directly with the executives, staff, and volunteers that power its operations. In doing so, the interview data aimed to provide a richer empirical understanding of how these internal dynamics — further elucidated by the documents unearthed in the course of my investigation — shape the

function of non-governmental actors in the politics of globalization, and how the process of NGO cartelization might work to undermine the representative role once assigned to them.

The third essay of this dissertation, however, aimed less to improve the empirical approach to existing literature than to expand its scope to account for actors frequently ignored by it. The Group of 77 remains the exclusive multilateral organization to represent the collective interests of the less developed nations of the world, yet — with extremely few exceptions (e.g. Lees 2023) — there is virtually no empirical investigation of its aims, operations, or internal dynamics. Beyond the text analysis that borrowed directly from Baturo et al. (2017), the third essay aimed to provide new data to facilitate our understanding of the South-South diplomacy, collected directly from its principals. Rather than rely on voting records, historical documents, or diplomatic communiqués, the third essay sought once again to get inside of the G77 through a mix of interviews and participant observation in order to shed light on how less developed nations are making sense of the present crisis of the international order, and what might be done to resolve it.

THEORETICAL

I turn now to the theoretical contributions that each of the chapter aimed to make to their respective literatures, and how they might collectively inform our understanding of the new politics of globalization. The first essay aimed to update and clarify theories of a popular ‘backlash’ against globalization. Specifically, I disaggregated the twin claims embedded in the backlash thesis — on voter *discontent* and their preference for *disintegration* — to show that these are neither empirically nor theoretically attached to each other by necessity. On the contrary, my theory of voter preferences challenges the backlash thesis to show that while voters can *both* sustain harsh criticism of the existing system of globalization *and* call for it to be bolstered by greater attention by their governments to its institutional reform. In doing so, we might adjust our understanding of voter preferences in places like the US and the UK away from the label of ‘anti-globalization’ toward a more nuanced one of ‘alter-globalization.’ Far from the fringe movement of activists that once gathered at the ‘Battle for Seattle’ in 1999, alter-globalization might now therefore be understood as a mass political phenomenon, with voters both challenging globalization and advocating for the renovation of its terms and conditions.

The second essay’s primary contribution was in the development of the theory of the cartel NGO. Scholars have long observed that NGOs can, under certain conditions, deviate from their ‘principled’ mission (Clark 2001) to behave more like market actors ‘scrambling’ for resources

(Ron and Cooley 2002). Yet existing scholarship has so far not developed a theory to explain the market structure that defines its distribution of spoils, and the consequences for our conception of NGOs' role in the broader system of global governance. My theory of the cartel NGO — adapted from the study of party systems — helps to address this theoretical gap, explaining how non-governmental actors compete, and *collude*, to develop enduring market power that can warp its effective or efficient function. In doing so, my theory of the cartel NGO helps to resolve the empirical puzzle identified by Bush and Hadden (2019) in their study of the declining birth rate of NGOs in the United States: we are not necessarily living through the “end of the age of NGOs” (Bush and Hadden 2025); rather, we are living in the great age of BINGO dominance, with the effect of muting the relative influence of global civil society from which they have come untethered in the course of cartelization.

The third essay of this dissertation similarly sought to develop novel theoretical tools to aid our understanding of the macro-level dynamics of global order change. Many scholars have observed the potential for a new NIEO ‘moment’ (Kozul-Wright and Gallagher 2022) to emerge from the wreckage of the liberal international order. Yet no study to date has sought to develop a tractable definition of such a moment, or the key conditions under which we should expect to detect it. The theoretical contribution of the third essay of this dissertation — building from the original insights of Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* (1944) — was to identify those six conditions across their full range of attributes, from the structural factors that facilitate the formation of a Southern bloc, to the institutional factors that enable this bloc to act in its interests, to the ideological factors that shape that both the force and direction of its aspirations. The novel framework that I develop in this chapter thus aims to help researchers identify the circumstances under which a new international order may emerge from periods of interregnum, and whether it may be the countries, “which, for reasons of their own, are opposed to the status quo” that will “anticipate its creation” (Polanyi 1944, 30).

PRACTICAL

The theories and data developed in the course of this dissertation are not only relevant to academic debates. On the contrary, each of the three essays in this dissertation has implications that are relevant to legislators, policymakers, and representatives across the world as they grappled with the new politics of globalization. In the case of the first empirical chapter of this dissertation, for example, the original data that I present suggests that voters hold complex programmatic

preferences over their governments' foreign policies. For far too long, academics and pundits alike have argued that the "sheer complexity" of globalization means that the debate about its future is "beyond the immediate capacities" of ordinary citizens. By updating our understanding of the globalization backlash, I have sought to challenge this conventional wisdom, showing that voters do hold clear if conflicting views regarding the system of globalization and its distributional consequences. Rather than ignoring those views — and inflaming the discontent that originally gave rise to populism across advanced democracies (Stiglitz 2017) — policymakers may instead seek to align their approach to globalization with these underlying preferences, redressing a longstanding democratic deficit in the articulation of foreign policy (Jacobs and Page 2005).

The study of the cartel NGO also holds key lessons for policymakers concerned about the integrity of the system of globalization. NGOs have long been considered to play a key role as 'transmission belts' (Steffeck and Nanz 2008) to relay the concerns of global civil society into the arena of global governance. Yet the findings on the cartel NGO suggest that this transmission mechanism may have been corrupted in the course of the ecosystem's 'saturation' (Bush and Hadden 2019) over time. Regulators have recently taken up the issue of market power concentration with respect to powerful monopolies in sectors like energy and technology (Khan and Vaheesan 2017). If NGOs are to play the role assigned to them at the end of the twentieth century — as "the true guardians of democracy and good governance everywhere" (Annan 1998) — then they may similarly choose to consider how to foster the conditions under which NGOs can resume their role as representative institutions that aid, rather than impede, the democratization of the global governance system.

Finally, this dissertation's investigation of the NIEO 'moment' holds crucial lessons for political leaders who hope to usher in a more just and equitable international order. Many leaders, particularly in the less developed nations of the Global South, retain a quixotic hope that — in the words of Brazilian President Lula da Silva (2025) — "the twenty-first century will be increasingly multipolar." But multipolarity is made, not granted. Without the articulation of a common project to define a multipolar order — and without the coordination necessary to forge the collective power to win it — the worst anxieties about international anarchy may come to pass, where might makes right and the less powerful nations are condemned to 'suffer what they must' (Varoufakis 2015). In the same speech to the 80th session of the UN General Assembly, President Lula asserted that the "voice of the Global South must be heard." The findings of my study of the new NIEO moment suggest that such a voice must first be cultivated — and brought into a chorus — before it can be an effective vehicle to transform the international order.

LIMITATIONS

What, then, are the limitations of my research? Looking across the three essays of the dissertation, how might the diverse contributions that I set out in the previous section be constrained by the scope of my data collection and methods of their analysis? In what follows, I articulate the empirical limitations of each chapter of the dissertation, and the theoretical implications that follow from them. My goal is not only to be forthright about methodological issues that I confronted in the development of the dissertation. It is also to open the way to potential directions for future research that can redress its limitations.

I begin by looking back on my analysis of the micro-level dynamics of voter behavior. The first and most glaring limitation of this research is geographic: while the surveys aimed to focus on ‘crucial’ cases for the theory of globalization backlash (Gerring 2007), the data’s restriction to the United States and United Kingdom may provide only limited support to the dissertation’s challenge to the backlash thesis, where it may find expression in other national contexts. Yet even in those crucial cases, the data suffer from important limitations. The backlash thesis, for example, carries an underlying dynamic claim: that voters are moving over time toward a stronger anti-globalization position vis-à-vis the past. While I attempt to address that claim by querying respondents’ own perceptions of attitudinal dynamics, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits the ability to make a strong assessment of the longitudinal assumptions of the backlash thesis. The most serious limitation also follows from this cross-sectional constraint. The micro-level analysis of this dissertation proceeded from the twin premises that we both lack a descriptive portrait of voter preferences over globalization, and that such descriptive data can help to resolve a longstanding puzzle about the extent of the backlash (Walter 2021). Yet a more comprehensive account of the globalization backlash would go beyond my analysis of its demographic correlates to examine the empirical causes that may drive voters toward or away from support for stronger forms of international engagement. My research is thus limited in its ability to provide the full, detailed, and nuanced portrait of voter attitudes that I argue will be essential to set the backlash record straight.

At the meso level, too, the research presented in this dissertation suffers from important limitations. By focusing on the theory generative case of Amnesty International, I aimed to dive deep into the organizational dynamics that define one of the most NGOs in the broader ecosystem. Yet the focus on a single case also limits the generalizability of my theory of NGO cartelization; insofar as this theory suggests coordinated action *between* NGOs, for example, my interview data — focused on the staff and volunteers inside Amnesty — is limited in its ability to shed light on these inter-

organizational dynamics. Similarly, insofar as the theory points to the evolution of the relationship between NGOs and the policymakers they seek to influence — toward a dynamic that I have described as *parasitic symbiosis* — the case study of Amnesty is limited in its ability to trace the process from the other side, shedding light on the practices of the policymakers themselves and their implications for the process of ‘opening up’ (Tallberg et al. 2013) that have been described as positive developments for the democratic character of the global governance system. While the research was thus generative for the theory of the cartel NGO, that theory thus remains to be tested across a wider set of key sites and organizational contexts across the field of global civil society.

At the macro level, too, my efforts focused on the development on a novel theoretical framework for scholars to make sense of the concept of an NIEO ‘moment’ and the conditions under which Southern states may seize it. Yet the empirical approach was limited exclusively to the institution of the Group of 77; if the emergence of organizations such as the BRICS point toward a new ‘Southern multilateralism’ (Roy 2022), then the focus on the G77 may provide only limited leverage in my investigation of efforts by less developed nations to reconstruct the international order. The nature of the data that I collected for this chapter also serve to constrain its conclusions. One of the key findings of the chapter, for example, was the increasing divergence between capitals of diplomacy and capitals of domestic policymaking in the G77, with the former retaining its Third Worldist tradition while the latter drifted toward a more *transactionalist* mode of development-as-deal-making. While the interview data serve to shed light on the former, the chapter was limited its ability to articulate the dynamics of such deal-making, or the ways in which ministers, bureaucrats, and legislators — outside the scope of my interview selection strategy — either contribute to or detract from the NIEO agenda. As such, the macro-level analysis is limited not only in its descriptive portrait of the ‘Zombie’ NIEO, but also in its conclusions about the precise conditions in country capitals through which it may finally come alive.

More generally, the dissertation’s three-paper approach creates limitations for the generation of a holistic theory of the new politics of globalization. While each of the chapters contributes to our understanding of micro-, meso-, and macro-level dynamics respectively, the dissertation leaves critical gaps in the articulation of the mechanisms that link them together across the vast geography of Global North and South treated in the course of the prior chapters. A more comprehensive account would therefore focus on the precise dynamics — of contention and cooperation, of social mobilization and political articulation — that define the encounters between citizens, states, and the representative institutions in between. I turn now to consider how these limitations may point the way toward a new research agenda that grapples with these emergent politics of globalization.

DIRECTIONS

What are the directions for future research that might build from the contributions of this dissertation? How might scholars redress the limitations set out in the previous section? And how might this new research agenda enhance our understanding of the new politics of globalization? I conclude this dissertation with a brief treatment of these questions, both as they pertain to each of the individual chapters and as they might come together to forge the multi-level, more holistic account that I described above.

I begin by looking back at the micro level. The core contribution of this dissertation has been to push back against longstanding assumptions of their “cognitive and emotional obstacles” (Dahl 1999) to the development of coherent preferences over their governments’ foreign policies. Yet my study was very limited in both the quality of the data that I was able to collect and the quantity of country contexts it was able to cover. Future research may thus build from my efforts to bust the myth of the globalization backlash to develop a more comprehensive portrait of the programmatic preferences that ordinary people hold over globalization — and examine the multidimensional variation between them. This includes variation over time, developing a longitudinal analysis of voters’ evolving attitudes to complement my cross-sectional one; this includes variation across countries, exploring the differences between the preferences across global income distribution; and this includes variation between different experimental conditions, testing the intensity of these programmatic preferences by exploring how respondents may react to different hypothetical scenarios of the geopolitical conjuncture. The goal of such research would be to take voter preferences both seriously and literally, recentering ordinary people in the accounts of the new politics of globalization.

The second direction of future research can both build from and further test the meso-level theory of the cartel NGO. In the previous section, I articulated the limitations of my efforts to generate this theory through the single in-depth case study of Amnesty International. Further research can broaden out this empirical account not only by looking at other BINGOs that may comprise these cartels — such as Greenpeace or Human Rights Watch — but also by examining the conditions under which NGOs are included or excluded from their process of cartelization. In this sense, one promising direction for future research may be to examine the boundary cases of NGO cartelization, comparing organizations like Amnesty to the smaller NGOs that struggle to compete for the access, influence, and resource dominance in its ecosystem. Another direction may be to examine more closely the consequences of cartelization, moving beyond the scope of my interview data to look at the actually existing constituencies of these NGOs, and how their evolutionary drift

away from global civil society has affected their ability to deliver for those constituencies. Finally, the theory of the cartel NGO may inspire future research on the mechanisms for its remediation, examining how policymakers may attempt to regulate the political space of global civil society to enhance — or further harm — the conditions under which NGOs compete to represent the preferences, demands, and priorities of their core constituencies.

The macro-level account of the NIEO ‘moment’ may also point the way to future research on the trajectory of the international order. Scholars may, for example, build from and dive deeper into the story of the Group of 77 that I develop in my third essay. The former may look at other sites of Southern contestation over the terms global governance, both in South-South forums such as the BRICS as well as in other North-South forums such as the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP), where states bargain over the content and distribution of climate finance to mitigate and adapt to the consequences of global warming. The latter, meanwhile, may explore variation within the Southern bloc of the G77 itself, examining which states (East versus West, more developed versus less, resource exporting versus resource importing) pursue greater protagonism in the struggle for a more just and equitable international order — and under which domestic or international conditions. Further research might also build from the chapter’s empirical insight on the decline and disappearance of the decolonization agenda, further elucidating the drivers of such a remarkable historical phenomenon — or the political entrepreneurs that today may seek to revive and renovate it. In that sense, future research may take a less pessimistic approach to my observation of the ‘Zombie’ NIEO, identifying the dynamics through its proposals — though not in their wholesale form — may succeed to come to life, and the specific projects or sites of contention with the ‘Great Powers’ through which they do so.

Perhaps the most fertile direction for future research, however, lies in the connection between the levels of analysis at which I have approached each of the dissertation’s three chapters. How do citizen preferences feed into state-level diplomacy? How is that process mediated by NGOs of different types, from cadre to cartel? Under which conditions can micro-level demands break through meso-level obstacles to effective representation to shape macro-level outcomes at global scale? By answering these questions, future research on the new politics of globalization can thus move beyond simply diagnosing discontent to tracing how demands for reform travel — or fail to travel — across the institutional architecture of global governance. By both disaggregating and reaggregating the micro, meso, and macro dynamics of this process, scholars can better understand not only why the current international order is under strain, but how a new one may yet be built.

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