What's Different About the Environment? Environmental INGOs in Comparative Perspective*

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Abstract

Existing scholarship has established the importance of environmental NGOs in influencing political and ecological outcomes across a variety of settings. Yet this work tells us relatively little about how the networks, strategies, and organizations in the environmental NGO sector compare to other NGO sectors. This article argues that adopting a cross-sectoral perspective can help scholars to better understand how theory and best practice developed for other INGO sectors can apply to the study of environmental INGOs, and vice versa. Drawing on data from the Yearbook of International Organizations and national tax records we find that a) on average, the ENGO sector is not more collaborative, better networked, more institutionalized, or more geographically imbalanced than other sectors; b) the ENGO sector is marked by a uniquely high level of concentration in terms of relational and economic resources. We call for more attention to the origins of these sectoral differences, and also draw out their implications for ENGO performance, suggesting that theories of "gatekeeping" developed in the human rights and human security sectors may be particularly relevant to the study of environmental groups.

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Introduction

Existing scholarship has established the importance of environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs or environmental NGOs) in influencing political and ecological outcomes across a variety of settings (e.g., Allan and Hadden, 2017; Betsill and Corell, 1998; Carter and Childs, 2017; Epstein, 2008; Gulbrandsen and Andresen, 2004; Ganz and Soule, 2019; Princen and Finger, 1994; Wapner, 1996). Yet this work tells us relatively little about how the networks, strategies and organizations in the environmental NGO sector compare to other NGO sectors that also seek to address global challenges such as health, human rights, or relief. As we show in this article, adopting a more comparative lens challenges much of the received wisdom about ENGOs.

In this article, we look for evidence of four claims common in the environmental politics literature: 1) ENGOs have a tendency to be densely networked and collaborative; 2) they are increasingly institutionalized; 3) their activity is concentrated around a few large players; and 4) the ENGO population is marked by a strong North–South divide. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, we do not find that the ENGO sector is significantly more networked, collaborative, institutionalized, or geographically imbalanced on average than other domains of non-governmental activity during the time period we examined. However, we do find that it is marked by a high level of concentration in terms of economic and relational resources. This degree of concentration stands out in comparative perspective, offering an important window into one way in which the ENGO sector can be considered exceptional in comparison to other NGO sectors.

What explains these differences? How do they affect the performance of international ENGOs? What does it imply for scholars? We explore different explanations for the concentration of the ENGO sector, evaluating preliminary evidence regarding the importance of normative, functional, and path dependent factors. We argue that concentrated sectors have important internal gatekeeper organizations that set the advocacy agenda and must carefully navigate relations with other organizations in order to avoid conflict. Although concentration can generate efficiencies, it also creates internal power dynamics that forcefully shape the orientation of advocacy and service provision. In this way, insights about NGO gatekeeping—originally developed in the human rights sector—should be especially relevant in the environmental sector. In contrast, findings from environmental politics about how excessive concentration generates conflict may not hold true in less concentrated areas of non-governmental activity.

The findings of this article have important implications for readers of *Environmental Politics*. By engaging in comparative analysis, this article shows that the environmental NGO sector is distinct in at least one important respect from other NGO sectors: its high degree of concentration. The first implication of this finding is that, contrary to some well-known accounts, metaphors of non-hierarchical advocacy networks may be ill-suited to describe the activities of contemporary international ENGOs, although they may be appropriate for understanding NGO activity in other issue areas, such as human rights. The second implication is that global environmental politics, despite the ways in which it may be growing more integrated with other issue areas such as development or global justice, can be considered a distinctive area of activity. As such, scholars should exercise caution when generalizing from ENGO behavior to other sectors of INGO activity.

Why Do We Need Cross-Sectoral Analysis?

Taking stock, it is clear that the study of environmental politics has been enhanced by many rich and compelling studies of environmental NGOs. This literature particularly focuses on questions of ENGO emergence, ideology, strategy, and networking (e.g., Balboa, 2018; Brulle, 2013; Carmin and Basler, 2002; Dalton and Rohrschneider, 2004; Diani, 1995; Hadden, 2015;

Saunders, 2004). We argue that the study of environmental politics can benefit from further developing a comparative, cross-sectoral approach. By "cross-sectoral" we refer to analyses the compare the aggregate characteristics, activities, and strategies of NGOs organized in different issue areas or "fields" (see Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Important scholarship has focused on cross-national analysis (Dalton, 1994; Rootes, 2013) and analysis across multiple issues within the environmental arena (Betsill and Corell, 1998; Gulbrandsen and Andresen, 2004; Princen and Finger, 1994). Yet there has been relatively little work that systematically compares environmental NGOs to NGOs in other sectors of global politics, with a few highly relevant exceptions.

Existing work that has adopted a cross-sectoral approach has generally used case studies from multiple sectors in order to establish the generality of a theoretical argument. For example, the foundational work by Keck and Sikkink (1998) used comparative case studies from the fields of human rights and the environment in order to develop and illustrate some of the earliest theory regarding NGO politics and the centrality of advocacy networks. Stroup (2012) compares international humanitarian and human rights NGOs across three countries, finding that differences among NGOs are more attributable to national origin than sector (see also Stroup and Murdie, 2012). Stroup and Wong (2018) compare environmental NGOs with humanitarian and human rights groups in order to make broad theoretical arguments about how status shapes strategy for groups.

Building on these important foundations, our article calls for an understanding of ENGOs in comparative perspective, leveraging quantitative cross-sectoral data to explore the characteristics of mobilization and strategy in this issue area. For the purposes of this article, we narrow our scope to include only international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), defined as independent, nonprofit organizations that work in multiple countries and whose primary aim is to advance their missions at the international level (Martens, 2002, 282). In doing so, our work resembles Murdie and Davis (2012)'s comparison of INGO networks in multiple issue areas and extensively draws on Jackie Smith and collaborators' landmark, longitudinal work coding and analyzing those INGOs reported in the Yearbook of International Organization (e.g., Smith and Wiest, 2012; Smith et al., 2018).

A cross-sectoral analysis also can shed light on core questions in the study of international NGOs. One area of perennial debate is whether INGOs are more "principled" or "pragmatic" in their decision-making and strategy (Bob, 2005; Cooley and Ron, 2002; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Mitchell and Schmitz, 2014; Prakash and Gugerty, 2010; Stroup and Wong, 2016). Although the extent to which scholars disagree on this question is generally overstated (Murdie, 2014), cross-sectoral analysis is relevant to both perspectives. The principled perspective would suggest that INGOs are primarily mission-driven organizations that act in accordance with sincere, problem-solving motivations (e.g., Keck and Sikkink, 1998, 1). Yet if different "problems" have different issue characteristics, would we not expect NGOs to organize differently across issue areas? In contrast, the "pragmatic" or market-based perspective emphasizes that INGOs respond to the characteristics of their environments, especially emphasizing the importance of competitive dynamics among groups (e.g., Cooley and Ron, 2002; Bush, 2015). Although all INGOs are doubtlessly competitive to some degree, a cross-sectoral approach can refine the market-based approach by offering expectations for how the extent of competition, and thus INGO strategy and behavior, might be expected to vary across sectors depending on relevant market conditions.

A cross-sectoral approach may also prove useful in identifying scope conditions for theory that is meant to apply generally to INGOs as an actor type. For example, Keck and Sikkink's boomerang theory suggests that INGOs are able to influence political outcomes in other countries by working together in transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). The theory requires INGOs to be linked in networks defined by "dense exchanges of information and services." A cross-sectoral analysis can identify the extent to which INGOs in a particular sector tend to coordinate or be connected to one another, identifying areas where we would expect the theory to perform more or less well.

There are also practical reasons to advance a cross-sectoral agenda. Stroup and Wong (2018) emphasize that INGOs can learn lessons from groups working in other sectors, and that they may need to collaborate across traditional sectoral boundaries as new issues arise. Understanding how sectors differ may help us to better understand how the interaction of NGOs in different areas of activity will influence environmental governance (Allan, 2018). In addition, Berny and Rootes (2018) identify a number of challenges facing ENGOs "at a crossroads," including tactical decision-making in response to policy failure. To what extent are these challenges common vs. sector-specific? Moreover, as donors and states are increasingly data-driven in their spending, INGOs may also consider themselves to be in competition with those groups in other sectors as much as their own. Such a reality makes it even more important to adopt a view that expands beyond one's own field.

Existing Research on International ENGOs

To begin to establish an understanding of ENGOs in comparative perspective, we now consider several descriptive patterns about these organizations. For the purposes of this article, we choose to focus only on "international" environmental NGOs. Following Murdie (2014, 1), we adopt an inclusive approach, defining INGOs as NGOs that are actively involved in at least two countries.

To advance our understanding of the international environmental sector, we first conducted a review of existing literature in this area. We sought out studies that tried to identify salient traits of groups working on the environment but that were not necessarily cross-sectoral in nature. Our search identified four particular claims regarding collaboration, institutionalization, concentration, and the extent of the North–South divide. Although these are not the only relevant attributes attributed to ENGOs, and are clearly related to one another, we emphasize them and examine them separately to illustrate the value of the comparative perspective. We begin this section with a brief overview of the sector and its development before reviewing the four claims we scrutinize empirically.

Overview of the Environmental Sector

Systematic environmental conservation efforts began in the second half of the 19th century in response to rapid industrialization. The creation of organizations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the UK (1889), the Sierra Club in the United States (1892), and NABU in Germany (1899) launched an initial wave of NGOs focused on domestic conservation and wildlife. Nature conservation became more internationally-oriented after World War II when the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) was founded in Switzerland in 1961 with the mission of capitalizing on public interest to raise funds to support projects identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (Schwarzenbach, 2011, 19).

Data from the Yearbook of International Organizations (YBIO) suggest that the environmental sector grew faster than any other sector of international non-governmental activity between 1950 and 2013, constituting 27.1% of the INGOs listed in the YBIO in 2013 (Smith et al., 2018). This development proceeded in several phases. The increased ecological consciousness of the 1960s led to the founding of the new cohort of groups that focused on a more diverse range of issues and activities, including Greenpeace International (1971) and the membership-oriented group Friends of the Earth International (1971). The 1972 Stockholm Conference was a further impetus for the creation of new groups, especially in the developing world (Longhofer and Schofer, 2010). The end of the Cold War also facilitated expansion in the number of environmental INGOs in the former Soviet region, and the 1992 Rio Earth Summit launched the Convention on Biodiversity, prompting major conservation groups such as Conservation International (1987) and The Nature Conservancy (international programs launched in 1980) to launch international programs. NGOs also formed of numerous transnational networks to advance their causes, including the Climate Action Network, the Pesticides Action Network, and a variety of regional coalitions.

In parallel to this development, the environmental movement also developed a more critical and anti-systemic component. Building on the work of domestic environmental justice movement activists in the 1990s, a new cohort of activists increasingly began to link environmental issues with global justice critiques in the mid-2000s (Hadden, 2014). This development led to the creation of high-profile groups outside of the traditional NGO sphere, such as Climate Justice Now (2007), some chapters of Friends of the Earth (see Doyle and Doyle, 2013), and other actors that challenged the approach of more mainstream groups. The tension between the older groups and those with a more critical orientation is often characterized as a major strategic division in the sector (Berny and Rootes, 2018; Fisher, 2010; Hadden, 2015; Smith et al., 2019).

Collaboration and Networks

Early work on this topic emphasized the tendency of ENGOs to be highly collaborative and characterized by horizontal networking relationships. Keck and Sikkink (1998, 2)'s well-known work emphasized the importance of "shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services" among ENGOs working on the issue of deforestation. Similarly, Wapner (1996) discusses the emergence of dense interactions and discourse among activists in the environmental movement. Much of the transnational collaboration among ENGOs is commonly linked to foundational United Nations (UN) meetings, especially the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (Friedman and Clark, 2005). Although other issue areas have such meetings as well, the environmental meetings often attract an exceptional amount of civil society participation (Backstrand, 2006; Binette, 2018), perhaps creating unique sector dynamics in the process.

But other work in this area has highlighted a sector that is marked by tensions between

ENGOs. Murdie and Davis (2012) conducted a network analysis and found that the environmental network was divided into two components: a main component with highly-central NGOs, and a smaller, disconnected component without intense internal networking. Hadden (2015) found a similar network structure in the NGO network working on climate change, with divisions between the major environmental advocacy groups and the smaller global justice-oriented groups.

Institutionalization

Scholars commonly argue that international NGOs have been increasingly institutionalized as part of the UN system and other relevant regional bodies (Boli and Thomas, 1999; Smith and Wiest, 2012). Martens (2002) argues that INGOs often make adjustments to their international organizing and structure after formalizing relations with IOs, commonly becoming more bureaucratic as a result of these demands.

Institutionalization is often argued to be particularly advanced in the environmental sector. For example, Tallberg et al. (2013, 769) argue that "the institutional preconditions for [NGO] influence have improved dramatically over time, and are particularly favorable in policy fields such as human rights, development, and environment." There are at least two possible explanations for why the environmental sector might be more institutionalized than other sectors. First, it is sometimes argued that the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 set up an inclusive UN Environmental Programme that helped spur the global norm of civil society participation (Backstrand, 2006; Hironaka, 2014). Second, the functional demands of environmental governance require a lot of technical input, and may increase the usefulness of ENGOs to international policy makers (Tallberg et al., 2013). Specific to the European Union, Fagan and Sircar (2015) have argued that the functional need to build a constituency to support integration of existing environmental directives in the new member states has led to an especially close relationship with the European

Commission. At the same time, scholars also emphasize that the environmental movement has a more "radical" wing that resists institutionalization (Berny and Rootes, 2018). As noted above, network analysis commonly reveals network divisions within the movement, with institutionalization as one axis of tension.

Concentration

While the early work on transnational advocacy networks emphasized the importance of horizontality (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), recent work on INGOs has tended to question that image. In the field of human rights, for example, important work by Bob (2009) and Carpenter (2014) emphasizes that INGO networks are often centralized around key gatekeepers that command a large proportion of the sector's financial and relational resources and exercise control of the agenda.

In the environmental arena, it is common to hear that major ENGOs dominate funding, agenda-setting, and press coverage. For example, Hari (Marc 9, 2010) criticized the environmental sector in the well-known "Wrong Kind of Green" editorial because of the dominance of highly-institutionalized and corporate-funded groups in service delivery, naming The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International as particular targets. Stroup and Wong (2018) show how few ENGOs actually make it into the public's attention, providing evidence that famous groups like Greenpeace constitute a numerically-small proportion of the sector but a large share of the associated media coverage. Hadden (2015) documents similar complaints against the big environmental groups within the Climate Action Network—especially WWF International—as a motivation for the founders of the global justice movement.

North–South Divide

Scholars have finally described a North–South divide in the environmental sector, consisting of both numerical dominance of groups from North America and Europe and a difference in substantive approaches to issues and organizing. Princen and Finger (1994), for example, observed a divide between Northern and Southern ENGOs on the significance to attach to development issues. In the climate issue area, both Duwe (2002) and Hadden (2015) have noted a numerical imbalance strongly in favor of Northern groups, as well as observing similar tensions to those mentioned above. Although rarely suggested explicitly, it could be argued that we should expect the North–South divide to be particularly prominent in the environmental sector—in contrast to other sectors of INGO activity—because environmental issues may be of lower priority than those related to development in the global South. Contrary to this view, the global prominence of the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda, as well as the positioning of the UN Environmental Programme in Nairobi, has explicitly tried to bridge this gap and may be reflected in the sector's balance of participants.

Limitations in Comparative Data Sources

While scholarship on international NGOs is quite rich, as demonstrated by the work referenced above, current data availability hampers our ability to answer some of our core questions about the structure of the ENGO field as compared to other domains of activity. There are four core sources of data regarding international NGOs:

- The Yearbook of International Organizations : The Yearbook is published by the Union of International Associations, and aims to assemble a list of all organizations operating across national boundaries. Smith and Wiest (2012) have created a dataset based on these entries, coding all NGO entries for odd-numbered years between 1953 and 2003. Murdie and Davis (2012) have also coded portions of the YBIO for use by researchers.

- IGO Rosters : International NGOs can also be identified by their participation in formal international organizations, for example, the UN's Economic and Social Council's (ECOSOC's) accreditation list (Tallberg et al., 2018) or the European Commission's Transparency Register.

- National Tax Records : Tax records can be another valuable source of data on INGOs. The National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) has coded issue area focus and international focus for organizations within the United States, as used by Bush and Hadden (2019).

- Surveys : Researchers also gather data on international NGOs by conducting surveys. Tallberg et al. (2018) surveyed INGOs from the ECOSOC registry, while the Syracuse Transnational NGO survey (Mitchell and Schmitz, 2014) draws on tax records as a sampling frame.

Of all these sources, the YBIO has the most global, longitudinal coverage. We do note that the YBIO lists only a portion of those organizations that exist in the population of international ENGOs; if groups in the YBIO are not representative of the broader population, conclusions drawn from these data will reflect that bias (see Bush and Hadden, 2019, 1137). For example, the YBIO reports 184 environmental INGOs in 2003 but only 14 democracy INGOs, whereas clearly the democracy population is much larger (Bush, 2015).[1] One further limitation of the YBIO data are that finer-grained organizational traits—especially pertaining to budgets—are missing in the vast majority of cases. National tax records are more comprehensive in terms of financial data and can offer reasonable longitudinal coverage

[1] This example further highlights potential challenges related to classifying organizations' sectors.

(from the early 1990s in the case of the United States). But national tax records are generally only available in developed countries and they often lack a coding to distinguish domestic and international groups. Survey research also offers the advantage of being able to address questions regarding differences in perceptions across practitioners in different sectors. But unless a survey is particularly designed for the purpose of cross-sectoral analysis, the small size of the sub-groups may limit the potential for this type of study.

Are ENGOs Different than other INGOs?

Acknowledging the data limitations noted above, this section takes a first step towards mapping the environmental sector using cross-sectoral data. Most of this analysis draws on Smith and Wiest (2012)'s "Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset, 1953-2003," which codes organizations from the Yearbook of International Organizations.[2] The Smith and Weist data cover 1,660 organizations recorded by the YBIO and include questions pertaining to geographic scope, issue area, membership, and collaboration. For this analysis, we compare six core sectors that the authors identified in their coding: environment, human rights, peace, democracy, development, and global justice. We dropped from our analysis those organizations that were coded as belonging to more than one sector (80 groups). While the YBIO does ask about questions about financial support, these data were missing for 87.14% percent of the cases in the dataset and thus were not suitable for analysis.

To address crucial financial questions, we also draw on tax records from the United States, as collected and coded by sector by the National Center for Charitable Statistics. These records cover the financial activities of NGOs based in the United States and are most complete between 1992 and 2012. Although not global in scope, analysis suggests that the United States hosts the largest population of international NGOs in the world, and thus

[2] These data and associate codebook are publicly available at: https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/ICPSR/studies/33863.

may provide important insights into the organization of this issue area (see discussion of generalizability in Bush and Hadden, 2019, 1137-1138).

Collaboration and Networks

We first examined whether international environmental NGOs were more likely to form collaborative relationships. We draw on the YBIO data, which asks INGOs to list other groups with which they are in contact. Smith and Wiest (2012) code this data to record it as the number of contacts the INGO reports having with other INGOs. According to these data, the mean number of ties reported by international ENGOs over the entire time period was 4.25, whereas non-environmental NGOs reported an average of 3.20 ties; according to the Mann Whitney-U test, the distributions in the two groups differed significantly ($p < 0.00$). This does indicate that international ENGOs are generally more collaborative than their peers in the general population.

But how do ENGOs compare with organizations in other sectors active on global issues? Figure 1 displays the mean number of NGO contacts by year for the the six sectors coded. Visualizing these data give us greater insight into how trends in collaboration compare across these sectors and change over time.

This figure reveals some interesting longitudinal dynamics. As anticipated, the number of contacts between international ENGOs has increased over the time period of study. As others have noted, this expansion in contact is likely due to historical dynamics at the end of the Cold War as well as the advent of new technology and lower cost travel in the 1990s (Reimann, 2006). But examining the time period of the mid-1990s onwards, the environmental sector seems to be fairly average for NGOs active on prominent global issues. Indeed, examining just the data from 2003, environmental INGOs reported a mean of 3.74 ties to other NGOs, whereas non-environmental groups reported a mean of 3.72 ties. This small difference was not found to be significant. Although the differences are small, these

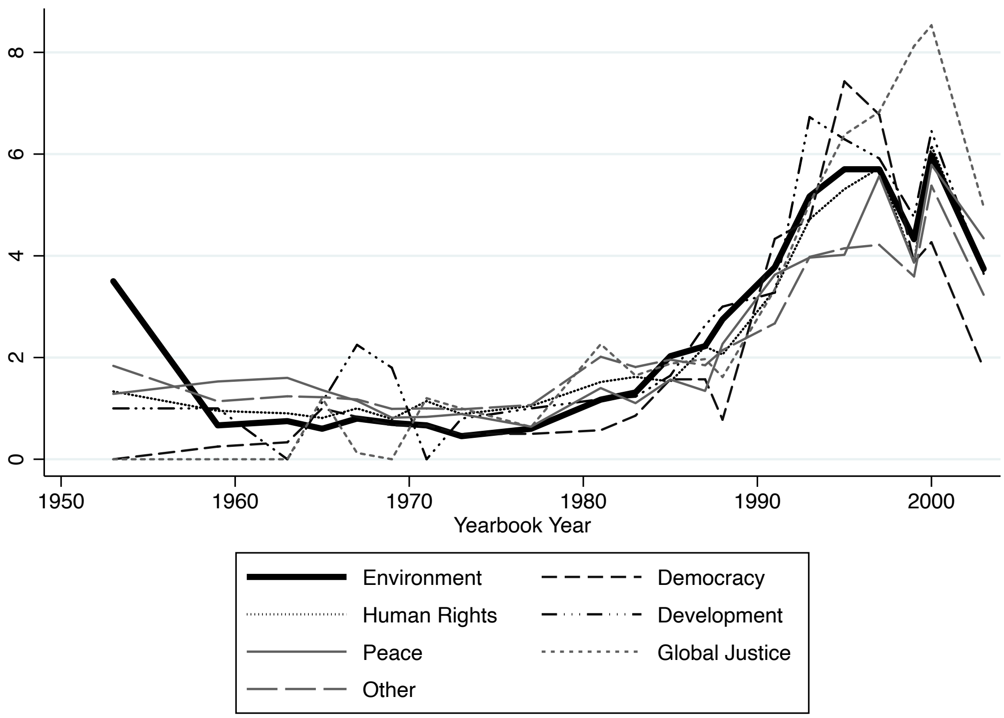

Figure 1: **Mean Number of Reported NGO Contacts by INGO Sector, 1950-2003**

data do perhaps show that international ENGOs were slightly ahead of their peers in terms of international collaboration from the mid-1980s to early-1990s, which is a period studied by Keck and Sikkink (1998), but that gap seems to have closed.

In analyzing network structure, Murdie and Davis (2012) find that the environmental network is organized into two largely separate components, contrasting with the more integrated human rights and health networks. Based on their coding of YBIO data from 2001-2002, they found that while the clustering coefficient for the environmental network was higher than for those in other sectors (reflecting a well-connected core), the average path length in the network was much longer (reflecting that it is harder for peripheral groups to reach one another) (Murdie and Davis, 2012, 184). This suggests a network that may be more hierarchical than horizontal. The unevenness in contact is also reflected in the broader YBIO data. Although the average ENGO in 2003 had 3.74 ties to other INGOs, the standard deviation within this population was 6.64, with the maximum number of reported ties being 55 and the minimum being 0. Thus there is a great deal of variation within the environmental population in the extent of collaboration. In comparative perspective, there is significantly more variation in the environmental population than in democracy, development, or human rights, although the peace and global justice sector had greater variation in reported ties.

Institutionalization

To examine the tendency towards institutionalization, we again drew on the Smith and Wiest (2012) data. The YBIO also asks INGOs to report the inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) with which they have contact. Although a somewhat limited measure of institutionalization that notably does not capture corporate ties, non-environmental groups reported a mean of 1.74 contacts with IGOs over the time period of coding, whereas international ENGOs reported a mean of 2.20 contacts; this difference was statistically significant. This pattern does indicate that INGOs are more institutionalized than their peers. But using an alternative measure of institutionalization as the number of reported consultative relationships with international organizations, ENGOs actually reported the lowest number, with an average of 0.63 consultative relationships per organization, compared to an average of 1.36 in democracy, the sector with the highest number.

To expand the analysis, Figure 2 compares the results for the the six sectors. These data show a modest longitudinal increase in IGO contact since the 1960s, consistent with scholarship that has emphasized the process of institutionalization within the environmental movement (Berny and Rootes, 2018). But, perhaps contrary to some accounts, it shows that the environmental sector reported fewer ties to IGOs than most other sectors—notably development and democracy—until the late 1990s. This pattern runs somewhat contrary to accounts that specify a pro-participation norm that developed in the environmental sector and then spread to other sectors (Hironaka, 2014). In contrast, we see that the environmental movement does not particularly stand out in comparative perspective throughout most of this time period according to this measure.

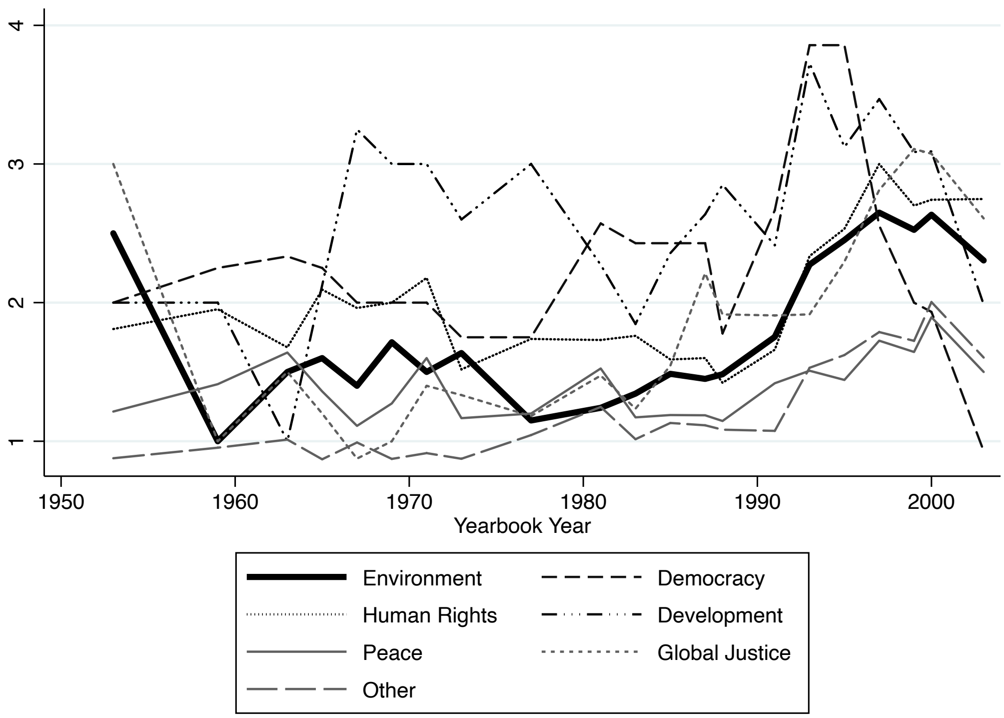

Figure 2: **Mean Number of Reported IGO Contacts by INGO Sector, 1950-2003**

Again, we see that there is substantial variation within the environmental population in terms of the number of reported IGO ties. Looking at only the most recent data from 2003, we see that international ENGOs reported an average of 2.30 ties to IGOs, but the standard deviation within the environmental population was 3.67, with the maximum reported ties being 25 and the minimum being 0. This intra-sector variation is the greatest of any of the sectors we examine. Although certainly not a direct test, this finding is consistent with accounts that emphasize a schism between highly institutionalized and more radical components of the international ENGO population (Berny and Rootes, 2018; Hadden, 2015; Murdie and Davis, 2012).

Concentration

To examine the issue of resource concentration, we draw on the NCCS coding of tax records for international NGOs based in the United States. Here, we measure concentration as the percentage of resources controlled by the top 1% of organizations in terms of revenue. Figure 3 visualizes this measure of concentration across six sectors of INGO activity since 1992. As noted above, total levels of economic resources have grown for all INGO populations up until at least the mid-2000s, whereas levels of economic concentration have generally declined among INGOs since the early 1990s, providing evidence consistent with accounts that emphasize growing competition among groups (Balboa, 2018; Cooley and Ron, 2002).

In Figure 3 the environmental sector stands out in comparative perspective for its exceptionally high level of resource concentration: the top 1% of conservation INGOs controlled over 55% of the sector's resources in 2012, compared to 12% in democracy promotion, the next most concentrated sector. Standing out from the other sectors in the analysis, the top 1% of organizations in the environmental sector have consistently controlled over 50% of the sector's resources since at least 1992 (when our data begin). The contrast between the environmental sector and the development and relief sectors—where resources have been much more equitably distributed among groups—could hardly be starker.

Combining the data on resource concentration with our findings above paints a somewhat consistent picture of how the we should view the environmental sector in comparative perspective. Although not more collaborative or more institutionalized *on average*, the transnational environmental movement is characterized by a small set of organizations that are unusually well connected and well resourced. In comparative perspective, this organizing dynamic suggests a way in which the environmental movement is somewhat exceptional.

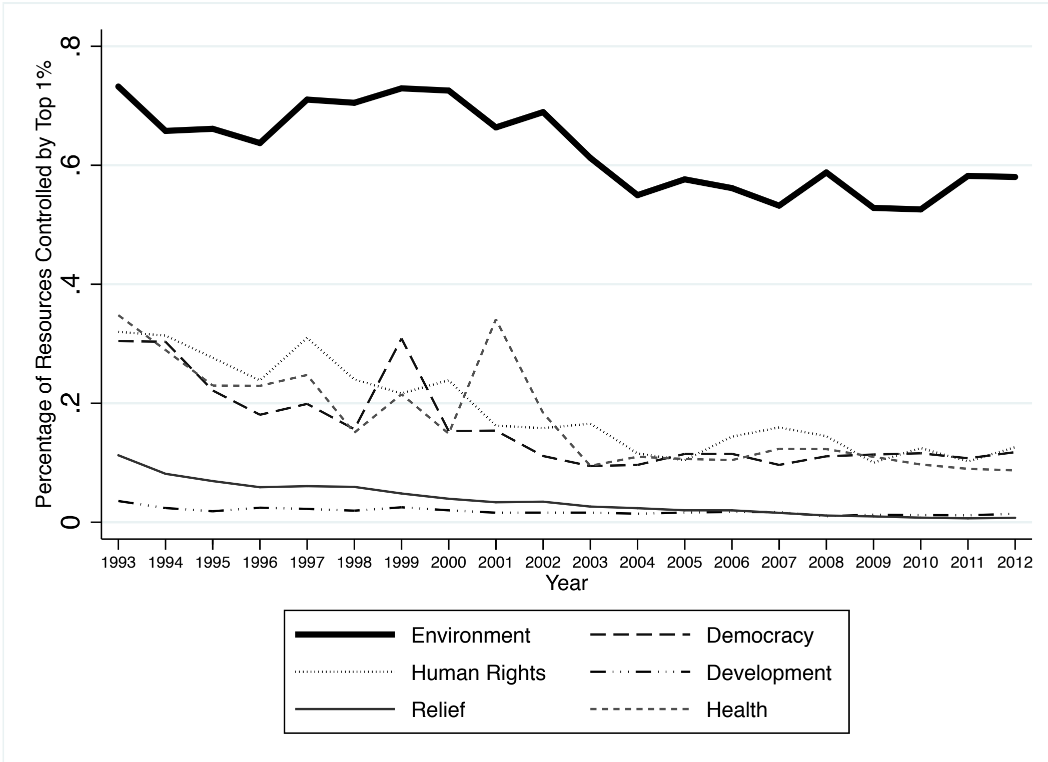

Figure 3: **Economic Concentration of INGO Sectors by Year, 1993-2012**

North–South Divide

We return to the YBIO data to examine whether the environmental sector is particularly prone to a geographic imbalance between North and South. Smith and Wiest (2012) record the city or region in which the INGO has its headquarters, which we use to generate a variable capturing whether the INGO had its primary headquarters in a developing country. On average, 17% of non-environmental groups were headquarted in the developing world, in comparison to 23% of environmental NGOs. In 2003, 21% of non-environmental INGOs reported being based in the developing world in comparison to 22% of environmental groups. These figures remain relatively stable as of 2013 (see Smith et al., 2018).

These data suggest several things about the geographic balance of the ENGO sector. First, and despite efforts at reform, Southern groups are still underrepresented in the ENGO population. These data do not reflect major changes such as the decision of Greenpeace Inter-

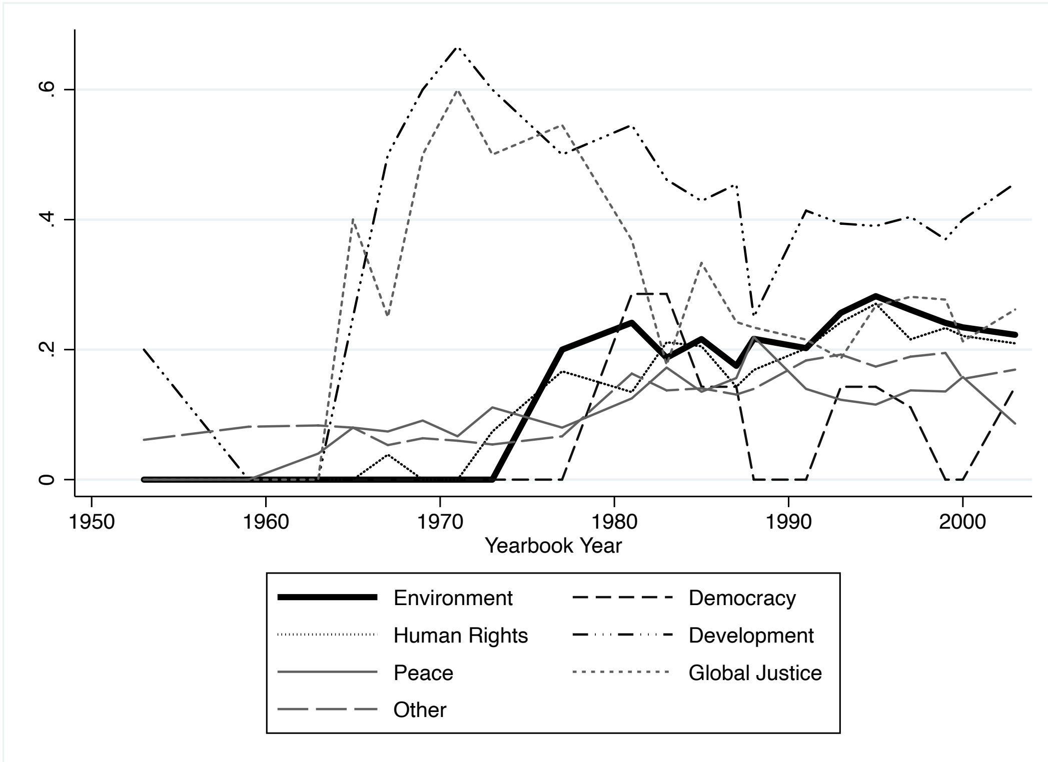

Figure 4: **North–South Balance of INGO Sectors by Year, 1950-2003.**

national to relocate its headquarters to South Africa and the growing push for decentralized solidarity in the Friends of the Earth network (Doyle and Doyle, 2013). But consistent with the observations of Duwe (2002) and Hadden (2015), we see here that approximately one quarter of the organizations working in the environmental sector are headquarted in the developing world. Second, we do not see that the environment is *especially* prone to geographic under-representation when we put the sector into comparative perspective. In contrast, the international environmental sector generally has attracted participation from more organizations from developing countries than most other sectors, with the exception of the development and global justice sectors. This may reflect the deliberate outreach strategies of the United Nations or the growing salience of environmental issues in regions experiencing rapid development.

Explaining Cross-Sectoral Differences

Taken as a whole, the findings above suggest two core findings. First, on average, the ENGO sector is not more collaborative, better networked, more institutionalized, or more geographically imbalanced than other sectors. Second, the ENGO sector is marked by extensive concentration in terms of relational and economic resources. These two types of concentration may well be related, creating a dynamic where more well-financed groups will also gather more contacts over time. What might explain these cross-sectoral differences? Scholars have generally put forward three kinds of explanations for organizational behavior that can be applied to our empirical observations about ENGOs. First, one possible explanation for cross-sectoral differences is that different norms regarding INGO behavior have developed in different issue areas. For example, scholars have often pointed to the formative experience of the UN Summits on the Environment as developing norms within the ENGO community. The slight tendency of ENGOs to be more collaborative than other sectors in the late 1980s and early 1990s could be seen as consistent with this normative account. But if the norm of collaboration first took hold within the ENGO community, it does not seem that the ENGOs remained exceptional for long. Moreover, the extent of variation within the ENGO population challenges the idea that a pro-collaborative norm was deeply held within this population. In addition, a normative account struggles to explain how the dynamic of concentration may have developed within the ENGO sector, and why this dynamic is so pronounced in comparative perspective.

Second, a functionalist explanation rooted in industrial organization can help to speak more directly to questions related to relative economic concentration. Economists expect some industries to be more concentrated than others because of the characteristics of the production process. For example, markets that are characterized by economies of scale tend to be more concentrated as do industries require a particular technical expertise. Do these market characteristics apply to the environmental sector? Arguably, yes. Successful participation in international environmental negotiations often involves significant expertise. Although the democratization of these international institutions may be decreasing this dynamic, the importance of expertise in this issue area may explain why some organizations that developed this knowledge earlier would be able to secure a significant economic advantage. On the service provision side, we may see similar dynamics at play. For example, the start-up costs associated with setting up a new nature preserve are likely to be somewhat constant, regardless of the size of the area being designated. Thus a group with a larger budget may be able to provide a lower "cost per acre" for conserved land than a group with a more limited financial scope. This dynamic may persuade donors and governments that it is financially sensible to support larger organizations, furthering the concentration dynamic.

But does such an explanation help us understand why other sectors are *less* concentrated than the environmental sector? A functionalist account may be a useful starting point, but more work could be done to compare sectors along the dimensions highlighted in this article. For example, the international relief sector contrasts with the environmental sector as the least concentrated sector in our analysis. It also, arguably, has a lower need for technical expertise and is less defined by economies of scale. The relief sector is primarily engaged in service provision related to short-term disaster response measures. As such, many relief organizations focus directly on provision of essential supplies—food, water, shelter, etc.—which, while incredibly logistically challenging to deliver, may not be highly technical in terms of reliance on scientific or engineering training. Moreover, while economies of scale are clearly present to some extent in the delivery of supplies during humanitarian emergencies, the costs may not decline as rapidly per unit as they do for a conservation project. This dynamic could be further explored by drawing on economic data about the costs of service provision activities from different areas of INGO activity.

Finally, we might also look to organizational-level variables or path dependent accounts to explain why the ENGO sector developed differently than others. For example, such accounts often emphasize the importance of "entry deterrence," whereby early entrants increase barriers to entry for newer groups. Bush and Hadden (2019) find evidence that is suggestive of this dynamic in the most recent time period, emphasizing that this dynamic is more pronounced in the environmental sector than in the health, democracy, or relief sectors. But such dynamics do not explain why the sector was concentrated in its earliest period, raising interesting questions for future research.

Implications for the Performance of ENGOs

What are the implications of concentration for the performance of the ENGO sector? Given its unique traits, it seems reasonable to assume that the international ENGO sector will perform differently than other INGO sectors. Although not developed to account for the dynamics in the environmental sector, our analysis suggests that theories of gatekeeping should apply to the environmental arena (Bob, 2009; Carpenter, 2014). This approach implies that larger ENGOs—the big three of Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and WWF—exert an out-sized influence on the advocacy agenda. Smaller groups may have to pander to them to get recognition for the issues and approaches that they care about. As Balboa (2018) emphasizes, this dynamic can produce efficiencies at scale, but it may also impede innovation and problem-solving that requires local contextual knowledge. Although we expect these dynamics to characterize the ENGO sector, our comparative analysis emphasizes that this dynamic is not general to all INGOs, and that other sectors—such as development and relief—may perform quite differently.

Studies of the environment have also identified a schism between more institutionalized and more radical groups that seems to have become more pronounced as the institutionalized groups have tried to more forcefully control the agenda (Berny and Rootes, 2018; Hadden, 2015). While this division could potentially contribute to a radical flank effect (Haines, 1984), Fisher (2010) has argued that it instead led to general restrictions on access and participation in at least one critical moment of climate policy-making. This finding suggests that dynamics in the environmental sector—where concentration is the most pronounced—may be somewhat unique. If we were to identify another in which such a dynamic could emerge, we might point to the human rights sector. But due to its dramatically lower level of concentration, the conditions for this push-back may not have been met.

Conclusion

The goal of this article was to establish the importance of cross-sectoral analysis for expanding our understanding of how ENGOs organize, operate, and perform. We illustrate the value of our approach through an exploration of trends in concentration, in particular. While our data are limited in some important respects, we hope to set an agenda for future work in this area that will explore other questions and more recent time periods. One challenge this article makes clear is that we lack sufficient up-to-date comparative data to address many of our questions. Unifying tax record databases with a common coding, while tremendously time consuming, would provide important cross-national data to explore financial questions. In addition, well-designed surveys with large samples hold tremendous promise addressing core questions about sector performance and outcomes. Finally, focused comparative case studies and network analyses can help generate data about relationships and path dependencies within sectors, exploring historical questions regarding why sectors develop differently and how certain actors become central.

Our discussion also points to the importance of linking the study of INGOs to broader work in the field of industrial organization. We suggest that better understanding of the market conditions in which INGOs operate may shed light on the cross-sectoral differences we identify here. Future work could usefully explore these dynamics, contributing to theory development in this area.

Overall, our findings may seem to point to a disempowering reality for many ENGOs: given high levels of financial and relational resource concentration, it may appear that smaller and less central groups face an uphill battle advancing their work and issues. Although this observation has been made of the human security field as well (Carpenter, 2014), better internal governance within ENGO networks can help to ameliorate some of these challenges. Faced with growing disunity in the sector, major actors like Friends of the Earth, the Climate Action Network, and Greenpeace International have all tried to reorganize in recent years in ways that give voice to the less powerful (Doyle and Doyle, 2013; Hadden, 2015). Studying the origins and implications of these reforms will constitute a useful research agenda for both scholars and practitioners concerned with improving INGO governance and performance.

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