

# How Many International Non-Governmental Organizations Are There? Assessing Missingness and Its Implications in INGO Datasets\*

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## Abstract

International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are important actors in world politics. Scholars have sought to understand when INGOs are founded, under what conditions INGOs affect national and international politics and policy, and why and how INGOs themselves operate. An essential question for all of these research agendas is how many INGOs exist. That question is perhaps surprisingly difficult to answer. This study documents the extent of missingness in the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, which is the leading source of data on INGOs as well as other actors in contemporary global governance. Furthermore, it develops and tests hypotheses about the nature of this missingness. It finds that the *Yearbook* is more likely to include INGOs headquartered in wealthy and democratic countries as well as organizations that are integrated into the United Nations system. These findings point to important ways that political scientists' understanding of INGOs may be biased by reliance on data from the *Yearbook*. They also speak to ongoing debates about the under-representation of voices from the Global South in global governance and transnational advocacy; our findings suggest that INGOs headquartered in the Global North may be even more over-represented in positions of power than it would appear given that the main data source on INGOs itself over-represents such groups.

# Introduction

A large and growing literature within political science and related fields examines the role of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in world politics. INGOs are active in nearly every major issue in international relations and are central actors within contemporary global governance. Indeed, the growth of INGOs has been described as part of a “power shift” away from national governments in favor of non-state actors (Mathews, 1997).

Research on INGOs—which also encompasses work on transnational advocacy, social movement organizations, civil society, and other related concepts—falls into three broad categories. The first examines the factors that determine how many INGOs exist, with studies highlighting how changing international norms, globalization, and international institutions have encouraged the spread of this organizational form (Boli and Thomas, 1997; Tsutsui and Wotipka, 2004; Reimann, 2006; Simmons, 2009). The second identifies the effects of INGOs, including on states’ environmental and human rights practices and inter-governmental organizations’ (IGOs’) policy agendas (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Price, 1998; Kim, 2013; Tallberg et al., 2018; Lall, forthcoming). The third considers outcomes at the level of INGOs themselves, addressing questions such as how they gain authority, form networks, and secure resources (Cooley and Ron, 2002; Gourevitch and Lake, 2012; Murdie, 2014; Stroup and Wong, 2017).

For all three research agendas, a central task is determining how many INGOs exist. The key source of information in the studies cited above and hundreds of others is *Yearbook on International Organizations* (Union of International Associations, 1953-2023). The *Yearbook* is the most reputable data source on INGOs that does not restrict its focus geographically or by issue area. Yet while the *Yearbook* is widely used, its limitations as a data source on

INGOs are not widely understood.<sup>1</sup> As we describe in more depth below, it relies on existing INGOs, the media, and foundations’ and IGOs’ lists for information about INGO creation, and then on voluntary self-reporting for information about INGO activities and funding. As such, the *Yearbook* likely substantially undercounts INGOs, although the extent and type of missingness has previously been unknown.

In this study, we document the extent of missingness, showing that the *Yearbook* fails to report the vast majority of INGOs that exist today according to several tests. For example, we estimate that, at minimum, 70% of INGOs in the humanitarian sector and 85% of INGOs based in the United States do not appear in the *Yearbook*.

Furthermore, we develop and test hypotheses about the predictors of missingness in the *Yearbook*. We build on recent research on the politics of global measurement that explores how the information environment varies in predictable ways that introduce bias in leading sources of data on human rights (e.g., Fariss, 2014; Arnon, Haschke and Park, 2023) and democracy (Little and Meng, forthcoming). We theorize that more prominent INGOs—specifically, those that are better integrated into the United Nations (UN) system, older, and from wealthier and more democratic countries—are more likely to be counted. We test these hypotheses by comparing data from the *Yearbook* to several more-comprehensive national registries of non-profits as well as a large global database of humanitarian INGOs. We find that INGOs from wealthier and more democratic countries are indeed more likely to be represented in the *Yearbook*. We also find that INGOs that are affiliated with the United Nations are vastly more likely to be in the *Yearbook*, highlighting the importance of this connection. We have mixed findings for our hypothesis about organizational age, which

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<sup>1</sup>Though Bloodgood (2016) and Bloodgood, Stroup and Wong (2023) provide excellent discussions of some of the issues involved in the *Yearbook* data, and Bush (2007) examines coverage of religious human rights INGOs in the *Yearbook*.

we discuss further below.

A central contribution of this study is to identify the extent and direction of missingness in the *Yearbook*. Our findings should interest not only scholars of INGOs but also scholars of other types of global governance actors, including traditional IGOs, IGO emanations, informal IGOs, and private transnational regulatory organizations, among others.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, scholars are increasingly interested in accounting for trends in full populations of IGOs beyond those that are most in the headlines, and the *Yearbook* is a valued source of information on these lesser-known organizations (e.g., Gray, 2018; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020; Roger, 2020; Debre and Dijkstra, 2021). As scholars seek to understand entire ecologies of organizations (e.g., Abbott, Green and Keohane, 2016; Bush and Hadden, 2019; Morin, 2020; Lake, 2021), having comprehensive population-level data is more important than ever.

In addition, these findings make at least two other important contributions to our understanding of world politics. First, empirically we show how conventional understandings about INGOs within the social sciences may be biased by reliance on data from the *Yearbook*. Many scholars who rely on the *Yearbook* argue or assume that INGOs are more likely to be present in democratic countries (where the environment is politically supportive), wealthier countries (where the environment provides more funding), and countries that are more embedded in the liberal international order (where the environment is more supportive of the INGO norm) (e.g., Boli and Thomas, 1997). Yet we show that *Yearbook* missingness is also associated with these factors, suggesting that INGOs may be more prevalent in less democratic, poorer, or less globally-integrated environments than appreciated because they are systematically less likely to appear in the leading cross-national data source on INGOs.

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<sup>2</sup>For example, see Hooghe, Marks and Schakel (2010); Green (2013); Vabulas and Snidal (2013); Johnson (2014); Roger and Rowan (2022).

Second, our findings speak to ongoing policy debates about power imbalances between the Global North and Global South among INGOs. Descriptively, transnational advocacy networks have long been dominated by organizations headquartered in the Global North, even though many of them work primarily in the Global South (Hughes et al., 2018; Cheng et al., 2021). This pattern of exclusion has prompted significant backlash and accusations of neocolonialism and racism, as well as concerns that INGOs are less effective when voices from the Global South are not centered. INGOs in some issue areas, such as humanitarianism, have accordingly taken steps to shift power from the Global North to the Global South.<sup>3</sup> Our analysis speaks to these policy debates because it finds that the main global source of information we have on INGOs undercounts Global South INGOs (i.e., those based in poorer countries) significantly more than Global North INGOs.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Global North INGOs are even more over-represented in positions of power than it would appear, making these power imbalances even more acute.

## Theory and Hypotheses

To theorize the process by which some INGOs become included in the *Yearbook*, we draw on research on the politics of global measurement (Kelley and Simmons, 2015). Within this literature, researchers generally assume that the people who create datasets seek to be

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<sup>3</sup>For example, see Jessica Alexander, “Five International NGOs Launch Fresh Bid to Tackle Power Imbalances in Aid,” *The New Humanitarian*, October 27, 2022. Available at <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2022/10/27/Pledge-Change-aid-reform> (last accessed July 24, 2023).

<sup>4</sup>The “Global South” lacks a precise definition but “is typically used to refer to the bulk of countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America” and strongly overlaps with countries’ levels of economic development. See Comfort Ero, “The Trouble With ‘the Global South’: What the West Gets Wrong About the Rest,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 1, 2024. Available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/trouble-global-south> (last accessed May 13, 2024).

accurate.<sup>5</sup> Despite their creators’ goal of accuracy, datasets may still be biased for a variety of reasons. Of particular relevance to this inquiry is that researchers have observed how changes in the monitoring and reporting capacity of entities like Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department have led to changing standards over time in human rights datasets (Clark and Sikkink, 2013; Fariss, 2014), suggesting that the organizational capacity of the data collector is a constraint on accurate data collection. Also relevant is the finding that even for seemingly-objective indicators based on publicly-available information—such as those related to countries’ macro-economic performance—there is often significant measurement error that is related to weak state capacity and aid-seeking behavior on the part of actors doing the self-reporting (Jerven, 2013; Kerner, Jerven and Beatty, 2017).

These findings suggest that both the information environment and the actions of the measured entities themselves shape the content of international relations datasets. We build on these insights to develop hypotheses about which INGOs are most likely to appear in the *Yearbook*. Before presenting these hypotheses, we first provide some necessary background about how the *Yearbook* gathers information about international organizations to provide context on why and how certain INGOs might be likely to appear in it.

## Background on the *Yearbook*

The contemporary *Yearbook* has its roots in the *Annuaire de la Vie Internationale*, a reference work that was first published in French in 1908 to track international associations. It was relaunched after World War II in 1948 as the *Annuaire des Organisations Internationales / Yearbook of International Organizations* in French and English as a commercial venture

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<sup>5</sup>This perspective does not rule out the possibility of coder bias (e.g., due to nationality; see Colgan (2019)), but it assumes that such bias is generally inadvertent.

organized by the Union of International Associations (UIA). The goal of the project was to help non-governmental and governmental organizations to identify potential partners in their issue area. Organizational information to be included in the new *Yearbook* was collected via questionnaires sent to the NGO section of the UN Secretariat as part of a broader relationship between the UIA and the UN, the latter of which sought to include NGOs as part of its operations (Saunier, 2019, 176-178). The information was originally collected via self-reports and includes details such as the organization’s mission, structure, location, and relationship with other global governance actors.

INGOs are eligible for inclusion in the *Yearbook* regardless of their country of origin or issue focus, so long as they meet the UIA’s criteria for an NGO that is internationally oriented.<sup>6</sup> In total, the *Yearbook* includes around 10,000 INGOs as of 2024.<sup>7</sup> Because of the breadth of its approach, the *Yearbook* is considered to be the most comprehensive source of data on INGOs globally and is widely used, including as the basis for other prominent datasets such as the Transnational Social Movement Organization Dataset (Smith and Wiest, 2012; Smith et al., 2019; Bloodgood, Stroup and Wong, 2023, 127). Yet its approach to gathering information on INGOs also leaves substantial room for missingness.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The UIA defines INGOs in the following way: “The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defines an INGO as ‘any organization which is not established by inter-governmental agreement’ (Resolution 288 (X) the 27th February 1950), ‘including organizations which accept members designated by government authorities, provided that such membership does not interfere with the free expression of views of the organizations’ (Resolution 1296 (XLV) of 25th June 1968).” Evelyn Bush has argued that this definition risks “missing a significant amount of global civil society activity” that is not instantiated in formal INGOs (Bush, 2007, 1650). This is an important question but one that is distinct from our inquiry, which explores missingness given the *Yearbook* definition of INGO.

<sup>7</sup>The *Yearbook* analysis below deals with organizations created 2014 and before, and contains about 7,000 organizations. In the future, we will update the analysis with with more recent *Yearbook* data, as well as describing trends regarding changes in the dataset’s coverage over time.

<sup>8</sup>The potential for missingness is also present for other types of organizations included in the *Yearbook*. Although this potential is not widely appreciated for INGOs, it is often acknowledged in the literature on IGOs; for example, the leading dataset on IGOs—the Correlates of War project—draws on the *Yearbook* but has deliberately used a more expansive approach to identifying groups (Pevehouse, Nordstrom and Warnke, 2004; Saunier, 2019, 193).



Today, the UIA gathers information about INGOs by looking at UN and other IGO rosters, inviting information from INGOs themselves, and conducting original research using newspapers and other secondary sources (Murdie and Davis, 2012, 180). INGOs may also submit information about themselves to the *Yearbook* through its website if they wish to be included. Given the *Yearbook's* approach, it is plausible that certain types of INGOs are more visible to UIA staff and thus more likely to be included and invited to participate (Bush, 2007). Moreover, the surveys that the *Yearbook* sends out have about a 35% response rate, creating further potential for missingness; we emphasize, however, that failing to respond to the questionnaire does not prevent an INGO from being included in the *Yearbook* but rather means that its entry lacks various organizational details.<sup>9</sup> Below, we consider the factors that make INGOs more likely to be visible to UIA staff and more likely to have the interest and capacity to provide information to the UIA.

## Hypotheses

First, we consider the environmental characteristics that make INGOs more likely to be visible to UIA staff and thus to be included in the *Yearbook*. We expect the same environmental characteristics to also make INGOs more likely to provide information to the UIA by filling out the questionnaire or submitting details about their organization.

To begin, we hypothesize that INGOs located in wealthier countries are more likely to be included in the *Yearbook*. The country where an INGO is headquartered shapes the resources it can access (Stroup, 2012). INGOs based in the wealthier countries generally have much better abilities to fundraise from both governmental and private donors in their

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<sup>9</sup>See UIA, “The Yearbook of International Organizations: FAQ.” Available at <https://uia.org/yearbook> (last accessed November 13, 2023).

home countries than do INGOs based in less wealthy countries. Thus, we expect that when they are based in wealthier contexts, INGOs are more likely to have the resources to conduct programs, travel to international conferences, network with peers, and build an attractive online presence that will become visible to UIA staff. They are also more likely to adopt the bureaucratic features that are viewed as legitimate within contemporary international politics (Barnett, Pevehouse and Raustiala, 2022, 23-24). These features make INGOs located in wealthier countries not only more likely to be visible to UIA staff but also more likely to have the capacity to provide information to the UIA. We summarize this logic in our first hypothesis below.

*Hypothesis 1: INGOs located in wealthier countries are more likely to be included in the Yearbook.*

Relatedly, we hypothesize that INGOs located in more democratic countries are more likely to be represented in the *Yearbook*. INGOs in more democratic countries tend to enjoy advantages that make them more visible to UIA staff as well as other actors in global governance. In particular, democratic countries are more likely to support INGO activity within IGOs (Tallberg et al., 2014; Hanegraaff et al., 2015). By contrast, INGOs headquartered in non-democratic countries are more likely to face repression and operating restrictions, which impede their fundraising abilities and also constrain their programming in various ways (Dupuy, Ron and Prakash, 2016; Chaudhry, 2022). As a consequence, INGOs there may have less capacity to participate in international meetings or coalitions or to develop international reputations. Repressive environments often also restrict resources to INGOs, potentially decreasing their capacity to share information with the *Yearbook*. Finally, repressive environments may make it less appealing for INGOs to seek external recognition

from bodies like the UIA, as being visible or associated with “foreign” causes or funders can increase repression (Dupuy, Ron and Prakash, 2015). Hypothesis 2 summarizes this expectation.

*Hypothesis 2: INGOs located in more democratic countries are more likely to be included in the Yearbook.*

Second, we consider how INGOs’ organizational traits may make them more or less visible to the *Yearbook* and may encourage or discourage their participation in international initiatives. There are a number of potentially-relevant INGO characteristics that could be correlated with missingness in the *Yearbook*. We focus on two dimensions that we theorize are particularly significant and that are also empirically tractable: INGO participation in the UN system and INGO age. We consider each in turn.

As described earlier, the historical origins of the modern *Yearbook* are linked to the creation of the United Nations. The UN—with its goal of having INGO consultation—provided a *raison d’être* for the *Yearbook* to maintain a list of INGOs, a framework for defining what INGOs are, and a starting point for creating a roster of INGOs based on its list of organizations with consultative status (Saunier, 2019, 178). As a result, we expect that participating in UN meetings is a key way in which INGOs become “visible” to UIA staff. The groups that participate in such events are also more likely to have sufficient capacity and interest in completing such a survey, as doing so may raise their profile within this institution. But many INGOs may strategically choose not to engage with the UN system due to limited resources, limited opportunities (or perceived opportunities), or anti-systemic or anti-capitalist ideological preferences (Smith and Wiest, 2012). We suggest that these

groups are less likely to be represented in the *Yearbook*. This reasoning results in our third hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 3: INGOs that are already connected to the UN System are more likely to be included in the Yearbook.*

Our final hypothesis centers on the role of INGO age. Older INGOs are more likely to have broad, ambitious missions and larger revenues (Bush and Hadden, forthcoming, 111, 156). These attributes make older INGOs more likely to act as gatekeepers and leading authorities within their issue areas (Carpenter, 2011; Stroup and Wong, 2017). By contrast, newer INGOs are typically less visible to other actors within global governance, as it takes time to acquire contacts and build a reputation. For these reasons, we expect older INGOs to be more likely to be identified by UIA staff and thus to be included in the *Yearbook*, as Hypothesis 4 states. We note that younger INGOs could have a lot to gain from increased visibility through the *Yearbook*, all else being equal. But it is also likely the case that older INGOs have more capacity to respond to the UIA survey, all else equal.

*Hypothesis 4: Older INGOs are more likely to be included in the Yearbook.*

If supported, our hypotheses suggest important but unappreciated ways that our understanding of INGOs may be shaped by systematic missingness in the *Yearbook*. For example, under-representation of INGOs from the poorer countries and non-democracies within IGOs and transnational advocacy networks may be even more pronounced and concerning than has been previously recognized (Murdie, 2014; Hadden, 2015; Bloodgood and Pallas, 2022). Likewise, the *Yearbook* may be capturing a subset of INGOs that are more likely to transmit international norms and influence from the international system, implying that studies in

the world society vein may be overestimating the influence of “INGOs” writ large by not including the full population of actors (e.g., Boli and Thomas, 1997).

## Research Design

To test our hypotheses, we compare the list of INGOs in the *Yearbook* to rosters of INGOs from comprehensive national registries and best-available issue directories. For our analysis, we draw on a recent electronic version of the *Yearbook* that contains organizations founded between 1900 and 2014.<sup>10</sup> The *Yearbook* over this period contains a total of 6,687 INGOs across 148 countries.<sup>11</sup> In this section, we describe our logic of case selection for the INGO rosters that we compare to the *Yearbook* and then our approach to matching organizations to identify missingness.

## Case Selection

To identify which INGOs the *Yearbook* includes, it is necessary to have some other list of INGOs for comparison. To examine the country-level correlates of *Yearbook* inclusion, we first draw on data from the Global Database on Humanitarian Organisations (GDHO) on organizations in existence through 2014. The GDHO is produced by Humanitarian Outcomes, which is a team of academics and practitioners that—among other things—seeks to “catalogue and monitor” organizations working on humanitarianism on an annual basis

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<sup>10</sup>In particular, we use the electronic version as of January 2017, which contains organizations founded through 2014 (indicating a lag in the time it takes for the *Yearbook* to recognize new organizations). We chose this year to match *Yearbook* content to the content of the most recent government registry we had available in the United States (see discussion below) at the time we began our research. Future analysis will update the *Yearbook* data and analyze how the dataset has been updated over time.

<sup>11</sup>This includes organizations listed as Type “G,” which in the *Yearbook* indicates “internationally-oriented national organizations.”

(Humanitarian Outcomes, 2021, 3). To our knowledge, it is the most-comprehensive list of humanitarian INGOs, containing 831 INGOs founded by 2014.<sup>12</sup> The team scrapes websites and uses organization lists from various sources to gather information on INGOs and other organizations.<sup>13</sup> The GDHO includes information about INGOs’ headquarter countries, making it suited to testing Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Although our focus on humanitarian INGOs is partially a matter of convenience—since we are unaware of a similarly comprehensive list of INGOs in another issue area—it serves our research design in two other ways. First, humanitarianism is a substantively important issue area. It is by far the largest INGO population by issue area in the United States, which is itself the largest home of INGOs (Bush and Hadden, 2019, 1138), and fittingly has been the focus of many prominent case studies of INGOs in the literature (e.g., Barnett, 2005; Stroup, 2012). Second, beyond its size, the other ways in which the humanitarian issue area is distinctive are—if anything—likely to bias against us finding support for our hypotheses. In particular, humanitarianism primarily involves work in the Global South and has been a locus of efforts for greater inclusion of actors in the Global South,<sup>14</sup> whereas INGOs in other issue areas such as environmentalism and human rights split their work more evenly between the Global North and South. This feature of humanitarianism could mitigate against finding

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<sup>12</sup>160 INGOs lack information on their country headquarters. For now, we drop them, though in the future we will determine headquarters through desk research to ensure these observations are not driving our results.

<sup>13</sup>The GDHO also includes other types of actors that are engaged in humanitarianism. For our purposes, GDHO categorizes these organizations in three relevant ways: 1) by “type,” which includes national NGOs, international NGOs, UN organizations, and Red Cross/Crescent organizations; 2) “national or international,” and 3) “country of operations.” In order to include as comprehensive a sample as possible, we subset to include any organization listed as type “INGO,” or listed as “international”. Additional (forthcoming) analyses adjust this slightly, including *only* organizations listed as type INGO. This first broad categorization ensures we capture as many potentially relevant matches possible, leaving room for different definitional characteristics across sources without losing too much precision.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, the “Grand Bargain,” available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain> (last accessed May 13, 2024).

support for a relationship between development and *Yearbook* inclusion or democracy and *Yearbook* inclusion.

Second, we draw on government registries as a cross-sectoral data source on INGO populations. Government registries provide the most-comprehensive source of information in the (fairly uncommon) cases where they exist and are made public, as these data stem from a requirement that NGOs provide standardized information about their activities.<sup>15</sup>

The main government registry we use to test our hypotheses about the organization-level characteristics that are correlated with inclusion in the *Yearbook* comes from the United States. The registry we use is from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS), 2015 edition. American non-profit organizations with revenues of \$50,000 or more (except churches) are required to submit financial information to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). For each organization that reports to the IRS, the NCCS gathers information on when the IRS recognized it as tax exempt, its revenues, and its issue area. Organizations that fall into the “Q” issue area code are the ones that work on international issues.<sup>16</sup> American INGOs are a meaningful population to study since they are by far the largest national population of INGOs in the world, at least according to the *Yearbook*, where they represent about one-third of the global INGO population, as shown in Figure 1. Over 75% of the INGOs in the *Yearbook* are headquartered in either the United States or Europe.

Although our focus on American INGOs for testing the organization-level hypotheses limits our ability to draw more general conclusions, we believe our focus on American INGOs

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<sup>15</sup>In some cases, government registries exist but involve voluntary registration, which INGOs may opt out of for various reasons, making them unsuitable for our analysis (Bloodgood, Stroup and Wong, 2023, 169). At present, we are aware of additional mandatory and publicly-available registries that exist in Bangladesh, Uganda, and the United Kingdom. We will explore including them in future versions of this paper.

<sup>16</sup>Not all non-profits in the NCCS have issue-area classifications, and some groups that engage in international activities are not counted in the “Q” category. Given these dynamics, the under-counting of American INGOs in the *Yearbook* is likely even greater than our analysis suggests.

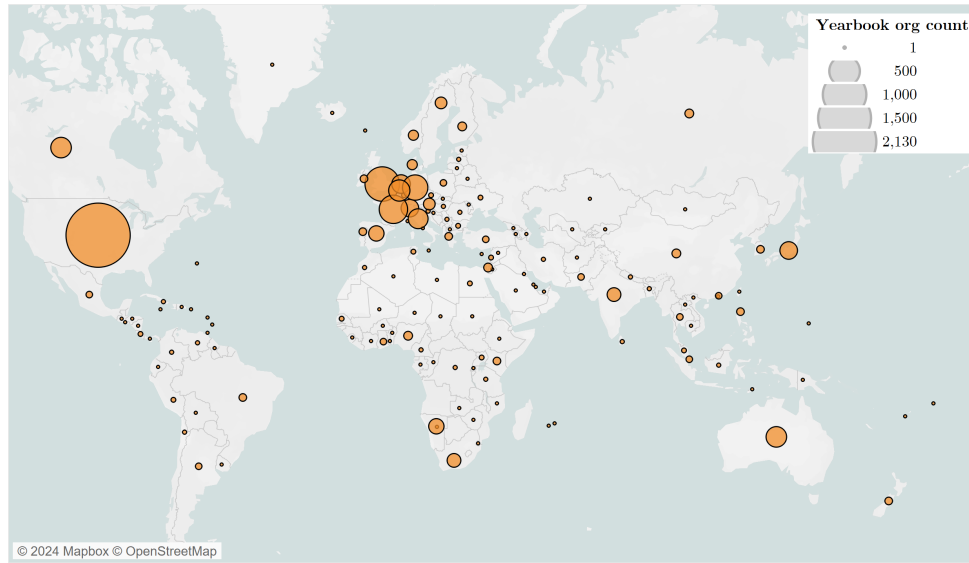


Figure 1: **Country headquarters of INGOs in the *Yearbook*.** Includes 6,687 INGOs founded between 1900 and 2014.

ensures a fairly hard test of our organization-level hypotheses. We expect American INGOs are more likely than other INGOs to be socially connected, prominent, and visible to UIA staff, in part because the United States is very wealthy and a democracy (as per Hypotheses 1 and 2). But this dynamic is also likely because the United States plays a leading role in global governance and American INGOs are unusually central within transnational networks (Hughes et al., 2018, 11). For INGOs that are based in other countries, being connected to the UN system and being older are plausibly *more* likely to be important predictors of inclusion in the *Yearbook* than they are for American INGOs, who may not require these characteristics to be visible to UIA staff.

We also draw on data from Kenya. Kenya requires mandatory registration and records the names of both national and international NGOs based in the country, with no other information. Since the registry lacks information on INGO age, we cannot test Hypothesis



4. Nevertheless, it allows us to test Hypothesis 3 regarding UN connections using data from outside of the United States; if the relationship is present across these two very different national INGO populations, then we can be more confident that it generalizes to the full population of countries (Slater and Ziblatt, 2013). Including Kenya also sheds light on how the extent of *Yearbook* missingness varies across two countries that vary in their levels of development and democracy.

## Matching Process

The same INGO’s name can be formatted in a perhaps-surprising number of ways in the context of a list or registry. Given the volume of INGOs in our analysis, we used natural language processing methods as well as some hand-coding to identify which organizations are included in the *Yearbook*.

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2 about the *country-level* variables that explain inclusion in the *Yearbook*, we evaluate how missingness varies across countries by comparing the universe of humanitarian INGOs documented by GDHO with the INGOs in the *Yearbook*. Determining whether the *Yearbook* includes each GDHO organization was a multi-step process. Before beginning the matching process, we edited the full name of each organization in both datasets to remove special characters and punctuation as well as to be lowercase. Then, we removed a custom list of “filler” words such as “of” and “in.” We created another custom dictionary of common INGO and corporate terms and their possible abbreviations (e.g., “international” and “intl,” and “incorporated” and “inc”), in order to standardize names as much as possible across the datasets. This process produced a “simplified” organization name for every organization in the *Yearbook* and GDHO.

The first step in matching organizations across datasets was the strictest. We produced a list of organizations in GDHO that had an exact match in the *Yearbook*; that is, a GDHO organization with the simplified name “save children” would be matched to a *Yearbook* entry also named “save children.” This step resulted in roughly 200 matches. We next implemented a slightly broader match, which allowed for all words in a GDHO organization’s name to be contained in a corresponding *Yearbook* organization’s name, but in any order. That is, if the GDHO’s simplified name is “children save,” it would be matched to all *Yearbook* entries which also contain both the words “children” and “save.” Finally, we manually matched the remaining GDHO organizations with the remaining *Yearbook* organizations. In total, about one-third of GDHO organizations are present in the *Yearbook*. Figure 2 visualizes the number of GDHO INGOs in each country, distinguishing between organizations that are included in the *Yearbook* (orange) and missing (blue). Offering prima face support for Hypotheses 1 and 2, we see that there are more matched humanitarian INGOs in Europe and North America than in other world regions.

To more formally test our hypotheses, we created a dichotomous variable that takes the value of 1 if the humanitarian INGO is included in the *Yearbook* and 0 if it is missing. To measure a country’s level of wealth, we use GDP data from the World Bank. To measure its level of democracy, we use the measure of electoral democracy (or the “polyarchy” score) produced by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Coppedge et al., 2011).<sup>17</sup> This variable ranges from 0 to 1.

Hypothesis 3 and 4 are our *organizational-level* hypotheses and predict that INGOs with more connections to the UN system and that are older will be more likely to be included

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<sup>17</sup>We drop some small island nations that have organizations in GDHO but are outside the scope of the other datasets. This reduces our number of organizations slightly, to 1,000 in total.

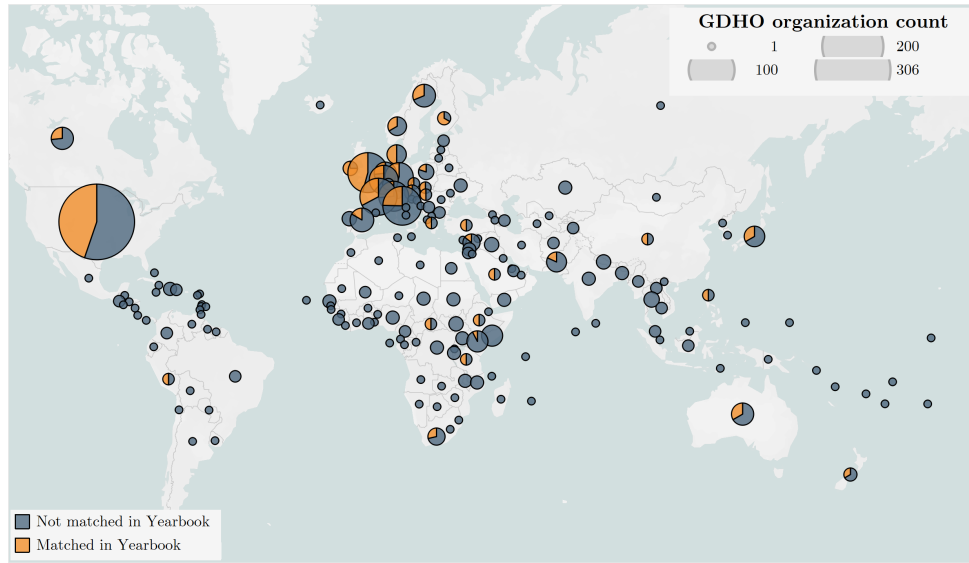


Figure 2: **Humanitarian INGOs and missingness in the *Yearbook*.** This map shows all GDHO INGOs by country. The size of the circle indicates how many INGOs are headquartered in a country. Each pie graph represents the proportion of those INGOs which are also found in the *Yearbook*, with orange indicating matched organizations and blue indicating unmatched organizations.

in the *Yearbook*. The GDHO does not provide information about organizations’ connections to the UN, but we can derive information about the latter via a similar matching process to the one described above. The source of information about UN affiliations, which include over 6,000 organizations (both national and international) is the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs NGO Branch, which provides an updated list of NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC and other accreditations (Economic and Council, 2019).

We also test the organizational-level hypotheses using information about American INGOs across all issue areas. To do so, we create a dichotomous variable that takes the value of 1 if an NCCS INGO is included in the *Yearbook* and 0 if it is missing. We match organizations in the NCCS to both the *Yearbook* and UN affiliation list in the same fashion as described above. However, because of the NCCS dataset’s level of detail—it lists branches of an organization separately if they are incorporated independently, with many hundreds of branches of the same umbrella INGO in different cities and states across the country, even though this INGO might appear just once in the *Yearbook*—we took some extra steps to ensure accurate comparisons. This matching technique was “one to many;” on average, about 30 NCCS entries were matched to each *Yearbook* entry. We then grouped unmatched NCCS listings according to the relevant level of analysis. We utilized a variety of record-grouping methods (including manual grouping of a variety of large organizations through simple string searches) to better group unmatched organizations into meaningful units. After implementing this procedure, we estimate the NCCS records roughly 283,000 organizations at a more or less comparable unit of analysis with the *Yearbook*. Of these, 40,355 are matched to the *Yearbook* data. In other words, more than 85 percent of American INGOs data are not accounted for in the *Yearbook*.

We use a similar process to match INGOs in Kenya, which come from a list of 11,324 national and international NGOs. The list contains no other identifying information other than organization name. There are only 29 INGOs listed in the *Yearbook* as headquartered in Kenya. A manual matching exercise matched only 10 of the organizations listed in the *Yearbook* to this list, meaning 19 *Yearbook* organizations were not accounted for in the list of NGOs based in Kenya that we have. This figure also means only 10 out of 11,324 total national NGOs are accounted for in the *Yearbook*.<sup>18</sup> The matched organizations were of a wide variety, including churches and institutes set up by different countries (e.g., British Institute for African Studies). Many of the matched organizations were founded in the 1990s.

## Results

Are INGOs from certain countries more likely to be present in the *Yearbook*? First, we hypothesized that INGOs located in wealthier countries are more likely to be in the *Yearbook* (Hypothesis 1). We test this hypothesis in Model 1 in Table 1 using data on humanitarian INGOs from the GDHO. We regress *Yearbook* inclusion on the (logged) 2014 GDP of the INGO’s headquarter country using linear probability models. As expected, organizations headquartered in wealthier countries are more likely to be in the *Yearbook*. Specifically, our analysis indicates that an organization’s headquarter country being in the 75th percentile of GDP versus the 25th results in an approximately 6% increase in the probability of the organization being found in the *Yearbook*.

Next, we hypothesized that INGOs located in *more democratic* countries are more likely

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<sup>18</sup>Future versions of this manuscript will attempt to estimate the percentage of these NGOs that are internationally-oriented through key-word matching and desk research; we will report results using this subset as well as the full dataset.

	Model 1	Model 2
2014 GDP (USD)	0.05*** (0.008)	
V-Dem		0.45*** (0.085)
Constant	-1.16*** (0.222)	-0.073*** (0.071)
N	831	831

Table 1: **Country-level correlates of *Yearbook* inclusion.** Standard errors in parentheses. Significance codes: \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ , \*:  $p < 0.1$ .

to be represented in the *Yearbook*. Our results are displayed in Model 2 in Table 1 and are again in line with our expectations. Among humanitarian INGOs, an INGO is more likely to appear in the *Yearbook* when it is headquartered in a more democratic country (see Model 4). More specifically, a country’s increase from the 25th to the 75th percentile of V-Dem’s polyarchy measure (a value of 0.867 to 0.9) corresponds with a 5% higher likelihood the organization is represented in the *Yearbook*. A move from a 0.5 polyarchy score to a 0.6 polyarchy score results in a 30% increase in predicted number of humanitarian INGOs included in the *Yearbook* from that country. Thus, whereas existing work suggests that economic development and democracy can impact INGO prevalence using data from the *Yearbook* (Boli and Thomas, 1997), in fact, these variables are also good predictors of whether an INGO makes it into global data sources at all.

Now, we turn to organizational-level characteristics and how they overlap with inclusion in the *Yearbook*. First, we hypothesized that INGOs that are already connected to the UN system are more likely to be represented in the *Yearbook* (Hypothesis 3). We test this hypothesis both in a single sector (humanitarianism) across all countries and in a single country (the United States) across all sectors using linear probability models.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	GDHO Data		NCCS Data
UN affiliation	0.25*** (0.040)	0.22*** (0.029)	0.03*** (0.001)
Constant	0.25*** (0.017)		0.01*** ( $< 0.001$ )
Country fixed effects?	No	Yes	No
N	831	831	171,394

Table 2: **UN affiliation and *Yearbook* inclusion.** Standard errors in parentheses. Significance codes: \*\*\*: 0.01, \*\*: 0.05, \*: 0.1.

Across all humanitarian organizations globally, as captured by the GDHO data, organizations that are UN-affiliated are indeed more likely to be represented in the *Yearbook*. We present our results in Table 2. Based on a regression of *Yearbook* inclusion on whether an INGO is UN-affiliated, we find that this important organizational trait increases the likelihood of inclusion by 22 percentage points (Model 1). This pattern is evident even when including country fixed effects (Model 2), which capture all country-specific factors (including wealth and level of democracy) that might also be correlated with presence in the *Yearbook*.

We also explore the relationship between UN affiliation and *Yearbook* inclusion by looking across all American INGOs, regardless of issue area. About 10% of INGOs listed in NCCS are affiliated with the UN. These organizations are significantly more likely to be listed in the *Yearbook* (see Model 3 in Table 2). The difference is large: an organization’s affiliation with the UN increases the likelihood that the organization will appear in the *Yearbook* by 3 percent: That is, American INGOs affiliated with the UN are over three times more likely to appear in the *Yearbook* than those that do not appear in the *Yearbook*.

Finally, we explore the relationship between the age of an organization and its likelihood of being included in the *Yearbook* in Table 3. We predicted that older organizations will

be more likely to appear (Hypothesis 4). Again, we test this hypothesis using data on humanitarian INGOs from all countries and American INGOs from all issue areas.

For this hypothesis we find mixed support. Among humanitarian organizations, younger organizations are slightly *more* likely to appear in the *Yearbook*, though this relationship is not statistically significant at conventional levels (Models 1 and 2). However, when we move our analysis to all issue areas by focusing on American INGOs, we find results that are more in line with Hypothesis 4. As shown in Model 3 in Table 3, organizational age is positively and significantly associated with Yearbook inclusion (Model 3). This analysis uses the date that an INGO was recognized as tax-exempt to determine its age.<sup>19</sup> These mixed results in Table 3 imply that different sectors may have heterogeneous relationships between age and *Yearbook* inclusion. Although our interpretation of these mixed results is necessarily speculative, one possibility is that newer humanitarian INGOs can generate visibility more quickly than INGOs in other issue areas by working in countries experiencing complex humanitarian emergencies.

## Implications

By comparing a roster of INGOs in the humanitarian sector and a registry of INGOs in the United States with the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, our analysis reached two main conclusions. First, the vast majority of INGOs are not represented in the *Yearbook*, the leading source of scholarly data on this important category of actor in global governance.

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<sup>19</sup>Although this date has precedent for being used as the founding year (e.g., Bush and Hadden, 2019), we note that there is some slippage between the concept and measure since some INGOs may take a few years to formally become registered with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. This date is missing for about one-fifth of NCCS entries.



	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	GDHO Data		NCCS Data
Age in 2014	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 ( $0.012 \times 10^{-3}$ )	$0.18 \times 10^{-3***}$ ( $0.012 \times 10^{-3}$ )
Constant	0.34*** (0.036)		$4.19 \times 10^{-3***}$ ( $0.6 \times 10^{-3}$ )
Country fixed effects?	No	Yes	No
Observations	477	477	163,852

Table 3: **INGO age and *Yearbook* inclusion.** Standard errors in parentheses. Significance codes: \*\*\*: 0.01, \*\*: 0.05, \*: 0.1. Note that a significant number of GDHO organizations do not have information on their founding year; these are dropped from the dataset, reducing our total number of observations by roughly half when compared to Table 2.

Second, consistent with our hypotheses, there is systematic bias in which organizations are included, with INGOs from wealthier and more democratic countries more likely to be included and INGOs affiliated with the United Nations especially likely to be included. We also find that older organizations in the United States are more likely to be included, but the results regarding INGO age are inconclusive for humanitarian organizations.

The main analysis covers only one sector of INGO activity (humanitarianism) and one country (the United States). While these cases make sense for practical and theoretical reasons, future work might identify other credibly-comprehensive rosters of INGOs that work on other global issues and are headquartered in other countries that have mandatory, publicly-available INGO registries. Expanding our analysis to other cases in such a way would allow for further development and testing of cross-national and cross-sectoral hypotheses.

Nevertheless, our findings have important implications for scholars. First, they suggest that scholars seeking to examine INGO populations as a whole—which is a common goal in organizational ecology (Abbott, Green and Keohane, 2016) as well as inquiries in other

theoretical traditions—will not be well-served by utilizing the *Yearbook* as their main data source. While most if not all data sources have some missingness, the use of credible issue-specific rosters or national registries is likely to be more appropriate for studies that require full information on full populations of INGOs.

Second, the systematic bias in missigness we document here calls into question the conclusions of studies that try to track the influence of INGOs on different types of policy outcomes. For example, studies have used *Yearbook* data to examine the effects of INGOs on states’ environmental, health, and human rights practices (e.g., Boli and Thomas, 1997; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui, 2005; Kim, 2013; Murdie and Hicks, 2013). But our finding that INGO inclusion in the *Yearbook* is consistently correlated with country wealth and democracy raises questions about endogeneity. For example, if the “true” number of INGOs in less democratic contexts were properly reported (i.e., higher than the *Yearbook* indicates), would we still see a strong, positive correlation between INGOs and human rights institutions or treaty signatures? Future research should explore these questions further.

Finally, these findings also have policy implications for those concerned with enhancing North–South equity in civil society participation. Here, our conclusion is that the widespread use of the *Yearbook* means that civil society participation in international institutions is probably more geographically biased than appreciated (Smith and Wiest, 2012; Cheng et al., 2021). Because the *Yearbook* undercounts INGOs from less wealthy and less democratic countries, we surmise that there is an even larger pool of Global South INGOs that are not being included in transnational advocacy networks and IGO processes than was previously known. For practitioners seeking to rectify the imbalance, it further suggests that seeking non UN-affiliated data sources is an important method for identifying potential new partners.

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