

Why do civil society organizations campaign to influence intergovernmental organizations? Evidence from a global field experiment

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December 2024

Abstract

Why do non-state actors engage with intergovernmental organizations? We answer this question by studying the conditions under which civil society organizations (CSOs) participate in open letter campaigns, one especially common type of political engagement. We argue that CSOs do so to raise their visibility, to pursue normative ideals, or to effect change. To test these hypotheses, we organized an open letter campaign that calls for reforming the selection process of the leader of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—one of the most powerful intergovernmental organizations. Based on the open letter, we conducted a global field experiment, contacting 8,226 CSOs registered with the United Nations while randomizing control and treatment conditions: we solicited CSO signatures by highlighting the increased visibility of participating in our campaign, the inequities of the status quo, or the potential for political influence. A total of 483 CSOs, or 5.9% of our sample, signed the open letter. Estimates from regression analyses indicate that relative to the control group, none of the treatments significantly increased sign-up rates. Further, we examine conditional effects, study open-text responses of CSOs, and leverage a natural experiment that occurred while our campaign was in the field. Results from these additional analyses suggest, however, that our prompts mobilized different types of organizations. By unpacking the motivations of CSOs to engage with intergovernmental organizations, our findings advance scholarly debates on global governance. Our study is also of substantive importance because it clarifies—in the real world—the conditions under which civil society can be mobilized to call for reform of the IMF.

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1 Introduction

International politics has long ceased to be contested merely by states. Non-state actors, including civil society, firms, or professionals, frequently interact with states on the biggest stages of the world (e.g., [Johnson 2014](#); [Sending and Neumann 2006](#); [Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito and Jönsson 2013](#); [Vikberg, Sommerer and Tallberg 2023](#)). Civil society organizations (CSOs) in particular have made great strides in accessing intergovernmental organizations ([Tallberg et al. 2013](#))—the formal organizations with a permanent secretariat where three or more member-states regularly meet ([Pevehouse and Borzyskowski 2016](#)). For example, the United Nations regularly consult with non-governmental organizations ([Otto 1996](#)), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank invite *some* CSOs to participate in the Civil Society Policy Forum held during their official Spring and Annual Meetings ([Cromm 2024](#)), and employers and workers are directly represented on the governing body of the International Labour Organization.

This ‘opening up’ of intergovernmental organizations ([Tallberg et al. 2013](#)) results from democratic member-states pushing for greater openness ([Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito and Jönsson 2014](#)), efforts at orchestrating policy implementation ([Abbott, Genschel, Snidal and Zangl 2015](#)), attempts to increase institutions’ legitimacy, and from learning and emulation ([Sommerer and Tallberg 2019](#)). In turn, the institutional openness has allowed intergovernmental organizations fill critical resourcing gaps ([Liese 2010](#)), enhance their performance ([Abbott and Snidal 2010](#)), and increase the participation of civil society actors in global governance decision-making ([Vikberg, Sommerer and Tallberg 2023](#)). While this body of literature helps us understand how and why intergovernmental organizations work with CSOs, we know much less about the reverse dynamic: Why do civil society organizations engage with intergovernmental organizations?

The political action of CSOs, and especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs), vis-à-vis intergovernmental institutions is significant—whether in environmental governance ([Dörfler and Heinzl 2023](#); [Hanegraaff 2015](#)), on debt issues ([Busby 2007](#)), or in the human

rights regime (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). CSO lobbying takes different forms, and we seek to answer our research question by focusing on one especially common and low-cost type of political action: open letter campaigns. These campaigns are frequently deployed by NGOs to garner and demonstrate broad support for their efforts, along a range of central issues in international politics. In the last five years alone, open letter campaigns targeted the IMF and the World Bank on issues spanning climate finance, governance and representation in decision-making, surcharge policies, anti-corruption, or debt relief (Bretton Woods Project 2020; BU GDP Center 2024; Eurodad 2022; Global Alliance for a Green New Deal 2022; Human Rights Watch 2020; openDemocracy 2019). Based on the broader literature on NGO advocacy (e.g., Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017; Hanegraaff, Beyers and De Bruycker 2016; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Steffek 2013; Vikberg 2020), we hypothesize that CSOs participate in open letter campaigns that seek to reform intergovernmental organizations in order to i) increase their visibility; ii) to pursue normative ideals and address current inequities in the international system; or iii) to effect political change.

Empirically, we run an open letter campaign that focuses on the leader selection process of the IMF—one of the most powerful intergovernmental organizations in global governance (Babb and Kentikelenis 2018; Stone 2011; Woods 2006). In exchange for financial support from the IMF, low- and middle-income countries around the world have implemented policy reforms (known as conditionality) with far-reaching socio-economic consequences (e.g., Forster, Kentikelenis, Reinsberg, Stubbs and King 2019; Kentikelenis and Stubbs 2023). Little surprise, then, that CSOs continuously monitor IMF operations and governance. One of the most controversial aspects governing the IMF, and the World Bank, is ‘the gentleman’s agreement’ which ensures that the head of the IMF is European, the chief executive of the World Bank is an American.

In cooperation with the Bretton Woods Project, an international watchdog of the IMF and the World Bank, we wrote an open letter that called for a ‘merit-based, open and transparent process’ to select the next IMF Managing Director. We then conducted the first global field

experiment that aims to motivate thousands of CSOs to join such a campaign. We collected data on 14,757 organizations registered with the United Nations through its integrated Civil Society Organizations (iCSO) System, and ultimately reached out to the 8,226 CSOs (6,617 NGOs) with valid contact details. In our attempts to mobilize these civil society actors, we randomly allocated arguments to sign the open letter designed to prompt concerns on organizational resilience, highlight normative deficiencies of the current selection process, or explicate the potential for political influence.

Our empirical results show that the theoretical expectations can serve as complements, rather than substitutes, in explaining CSOs' motivations. Overall, 5.9% of CSOs in our sample—483 organizations—signed the open letter. Yet our baseline analysis shows that none of the three treatments significantly increased sign-up rates relative to the control group that provides merely a narrow description of the campaign. In fact, our results indicate that CSOs exposed to the political-influence treatment are significantly less likely to join the open letter campaign.

The results of additional, exploratory analyses suggest that these results are driven by differential motivations across the heterogeneous population of CSOs. Three findings stand out. First, among CSOs that read the campaign letter (as approximated by click rates), those treated with organizational visibility were most likely to participate in the campaign. We interpret this as evidence that the treatment motivated a sub-group of CSOs that prioritize visibility over the content of the letter. Second, we manually coded open-text responses of CSOs to understand their self-stated motivations for participating in the campaign: organizations highlighted normative values and political influence across control group and treatment conditions. Third, we show how differences in the political context shape the effectiveness of campaign-merit treatments. To do so, we leverage a natural experiment that occurred during the campaign. European member-states announced their support for a second term of Kristalina Georgieva as IMF Managing Director during our study, thereby potentially changing the cost-benefit analysis for CSOs. This announcement reinforced the

normative importance of the campaign, while undermining the likelihood that it would lead to political change. Indeed, we see an increase in sign-up rates after the announcement on average, but this increase is significantly less pronounced for CSOs that received the political-influence treatment.

Our study has important implications for debates on global governance. Advancing earlier work on NGOs and interest groups ([Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017](#); [Steffek 2013](#); [Tallberg, Dellmuth, Agné and Duit 2018](#); [Vikberg 2020](#)), we tested the motivations of CSOs to become politically active in the real world. We find that extant explanations of CSO motivations—emphasizing organizational longevity, normative values, and political influence—are wrongly placed in competition with each other. Instead, they are likely to apply to different types of CSOs, which indicates that scholars of civil society organizations and interest groups, international or domestic, should move beyond assumptions of unitary, homogenous actors and unpack their research objects.

In terms of policy relevance, our research can guide campaign organizers on how to mobilize CSOs and increase their impact. Through our systematic approach, our open letter campaign with the Bretton Woods Project more than doubled sign-up rates compared to a similar effort three years earlier (e.g., [Bretton Woods Project 2021](#)). Our analyses indicate that some civil society actors are likely to be mobilized to increase their visibility and potentially attract funding. Normative values are also pertinent, though not necessarily as anticipated in terms of the unequal distribution of votes, but rather because CSOs participate in campaigns to show solidarity with other CSOs. Finally, we do find that organizations can take cues from the real world and evaluate the likelihood of success prior to participating—in our case, once the campaign was doomed to fail because European member-states supported a second term for Kristalina Georgieva, sign-up rates decreased significantly. This information helps practitioners design open letter campaigns with a greater reach.

2 CSOs, lobbying, and competing logics of political action

Scholarship on domestic interest groups traditionally employ a dichotomy that contrasts the logic of survival with the logic of campaign merit to explain what motivates their research objects, (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017; Gourevitch, Lake and Gross Stein 2012; Gray and Lowery 1996; Hanegraaff, Beyers and De Bruycker 2016; Prakash and Gugerty 2010; Stroup and Wong 2017). Although the two are often intertwined in practice, they imply distinct theoretical predictions. In the following, we consider both perspectives to derive three testable expectations. Specifically, we posit that the likelihood of CSOs participating in an open letter campaign towards intergovernmental organizations depends on the anticipation of: *organizational visibility, normative values, and political influence*.

Every year, scores of CSOs face external pressures that threaten their existence (Bush and Hadden 2019; Gray and Lowery 1997; Halpin and Thomas 2012; Heylen, Fraussen and Beyers 2018; Witjas, Hanegraaff and Vermeulen 2020). CSOs, like any other organization, therefore strive to ensure their organizational survival. Organizations are in decline when they lack the funding to continue their operations in a meaningful way. But their survival may also be at risk when key stakeholders stop considering them as valuable sources of information in their area of interest such that demand for their services decreases. Securing organizational survival thus necessitates CSOs to raise sufficient funds and to signify their credibility and legitimacy to key audiences, such as members, other organizations, and funders (Gourevitch, Lake and Gross Stein 2012; Witjas, Hanegraaff and Vermeulen 2020).

We argue the logic of survival implies that *organizational visibility* informs CSOs' decision to engage with campaigns. Whether or not CSOs sign an open letter is certainly not a matter of life and death. Nevertheless, concerns for organizational maintenance affect how CSOs conduct their lobbying efforts: Especially organizations on a small budget tend to rely on outside lobbying (e.g., by trying to mobilize the public) because it can increase

their visibility to donors and potentially allows CSOs to influence decisions relatively cost-effectively (Dür and Mateo 2013; Hanegraaff, Beyers and De Bruycker 2016). At the same time, we acknowledge that signing an open letter to call for change at an intergovernmental organization can be a risky strategy for CSOs concerned about their survival. Member-states of intergovernmental organizations are often important sources of funding and legitimacy for CSOs due to their (relatively speaking) plentiful resources and prominent profile in global governance (Steffek 2013). CSOs therefore need to weigh the costs and benefits of publicly calling for change at intergovernmental organizations carefully when deciding whether or not to join a campaign—like signing an open letter—towards powerful institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. The observable implications of this trade-off are as follows:

H1 *Organizational visibility*: Highlighting the potential for enhancing organizational visibility will increase the likelihood that CSOs sign the open letter.

Second, the logic of campaign merit implies that CSOs are primarily motivated by effecting change, but for various reasons. CSOs frequently push for reforms in line with their understanding of ‘the right thing’ to do (e.g., Busby 2007) and exercise political influence on the policymaking of intergovernmental organizations (Steffek 2013). Policy change as a motivation has been a longstanding assumption of scholarship examining domestic lobbying and the influence of international CSOs (Betsill and Corell 2008; Dahl 1961; Lowery 2007; Smith 2000; Truman 1951), and many empirical studies build on this assumption (Dörfler and Heinzl 2023; Klüver 2009; Klüver, Braun and Beyers 2015; Ohanyan 2009; Tallberg et al. 2018). Based on these studies, we argue that CSOs will consider a) the normative dimensions of a campaign’s goals and b) the likelihood of campaign success when deciding whether they support these efforts.

Open letter campaigns are but one example of an outside influence strategy, which can allow organizations to achieve the goal of policy influence. The main purpose of open letter campaigns is to mobilize public opinion or change views within elite communities. For instance, CSOs can raise the profile of an issue, articulate problems of the status quo,

and generate momentum among relevant political actors (Busby 2010; Gulbrandsen and Andresen 2004). These campaigns can also help build a transnational network of like-minded organizations that push for common goals. Such transnational networks have long been the focus of international relations scholars (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Khagram, Riker and Sikkink 2002). By building networks and acting collectively, CSOs can wield more power than they have on their own.

A campaign needs to fulfill two criteria for this logic to apply: it needs to pursue a normatively-desirable goal and it needs to be (somewhat) realistic. If a campaign does not focus on a worthy goal—from the perspective of the CSO—they will not be willing to push for it. At the same time, CSOs have limited capacity for action. This implies that CSOs driven by policy influence will consider the likelihood that a campaign can lead to said influence. Of course, this criterion is not categorically true. A particularly worthy goal may induce CSOs to lobby despite very low chances of success. For example, CSOs have long pushed for abandoning the veto at the UN Security Council (Millennium Forum 2000). The logic of campaign merit therefore yields two further testable implications:

H2 *Normative values*: Highlighting the normative deficiencies of the status quo will increase the likelihood that CSOs sign the open letter.

H3 *Political influence*: Highlighting the potential for political influence will increase the likelihood that CSOs sign the open letter.

3 Research design

Empirically, we ascertain the relative importance of these explanations based on a global field experiment that examines whether and why CSOs engage in political action to reform the decision-making rules of the IMF. Field experiments are ideally suited for our purpose as they combine the internal validity of experimental studies with the external validity of studying real-world events (Gerber and Green 2012). Such experiments are rare in the study

of international organizations (Findley, Nielson and Sharman 2013; Nielson, Hyde and Kelley 2019) and—to our knowledge—have not been used to examine CSO campaigns towards intergovernmental organizations.

We organized our own open letter campaign with the Bretton Woods Project—a leading international NGO that independently monitors the work of the IMF and the World Bank. The Bretton Woods Project regularly comments on selection processes of the IMF, and mobilizes civil society. Due to its wide reach and prominence, it was an ideal partner to co-write an open letter that demands the end of the ‘gentleman’s agreement’ and calls for a meritocratic, open, and transparent selection process of the next IMF Managing Director—see Appendix B. In calling for the termination of the gentleman’s agreement (which effectively allows member-states from the Global North to appoint their desired candidate to the highest position of the Bretton Woods institutions), we follow in the footsteps of academics and CSOs that have long demanded a more meritocratic selection process. They also proposed an alternative that would give voice to relatively weak states: employing a double-majority voting rule such that leaders of these institutions need the support of countries representing a majority both of votes and number of member-states (e.g., Rapkin and Strand 2006; Woods 2006), rather than simply the majority of votes that enables European member-states and the United States to uphold the gentleman’s agreement.

After writing the open letter, we contacted 8,254 organizations and asked whether they would like to participate in our campaign. This sample consists of CSOs registered with the United Nations integrated Civil Society Organizations (iCSO), as per 30 November 2022; we provide more details on the sample in Appendix C.¹ The iCSO System was developed by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) to facilitate interactions between CSOs and DESA. Organizations can register a profile, including their address, geographic focus, and mandate to keep up-to-date with DESA’s activities—it also facilitates the application

¹At the time of data collection, 14,757 organizations were registered with the UN iCSO. Of those, 13,466 organizations provided an email address although 5,212 emails bounced, thereby yielding a total of 8,254 observations. Since 28 opted out of our study, all our analyses draw on the final sample size of 8,226 CSOs.

procedure for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). We use data on characteristics of CSOs in additional analyses, as discussed below.

Our primary dependent variable is whether or not a CSO signed the open letter. The variable is coded as 1 if a given organization filled out the questionnaire and stated their interest to participate, and takes the value of 0 otherwise. The campaign we co-run is real and each organization (or individual) that filled out the questionnaire is actually listed as a contributor. We also employed a second dependent variable that tracks whether a recipient clicked on a personalized link provided in the email. This approach allows us to differentiate whether our treatments generated differential interest and action.

We conducted our study between 10 March and 24 March. After the initial email, we sent two reminders, on 15 March and on 20 March, such that the data collection lasted approximately two weeks. Our emails included some baseline information (the control group) and one of three randomly assigned treatments; as displayed in Box 1. We also varied the subject line of the email according to the treatment.

Box 1: Sample email

Dear [CSO],

In April 2024, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, two of the most powerful organizations in global economic governance, will hold their annual Spring Meetings in Washington, DC—the last such meeting before Kristalina Georgieva’s term as IMF Managing Director ends in September.

To decide on who will lead the respective organizations, the IMF and the World Bank have long used the so-called ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ which de facto means that the United States and European countries elect the organizations’ chief executives. The **Bretton Woods Project**, a leading NGO, has launched an **open letter to demand an open, transparent, and meritocratic process to select the next IMF Managing Director**—and **invites you to participate in this campaign**.

We hereby offer you the **unique opportunity to join CSOs around the globe** to participate in this campaign. As signatory, your name will be listed on the letter and the campaign can thus **increase the visibility of your organization** [Treatment 1].

We hereby offer you the **unique opportunity to join CSOs around the globe** to participate in this campaign. The letter **challenges the current system which is highly unequal** because it favors powerful states from the Global North such that the voices of small states and borrowing countries are often marginalized [Treatment 2].

We hereby offer you the **unique opportunity to join CSOs around the globe** to participate in this campaign. The letter allows your organization to participate in a concerted effort to **exercise influence on the selection process of the IMF’s next leader** [Treatment 3].

You can access the letter here [personalized link to letter]. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,
Bretton Woods Project, Timon Forster, and Mirko Heinzl

Notes: All three treatments displayed; in practice, none (control group) or at most one treatment (randomized) was included in the email sent on 10 March 2024.

To test whether our motivational probes induced a differential likelihood to sign the open letter or click on the invitation link, we estimate the following two linear probability models in our baseline analysis:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta'X + \epsilon_i \tag{1}$$

where y_i is a binary variable equal to 1 if civil society organization i *signed* the open letter or *clicked* on the link, respectively. α is the constant, representing the pure control group. X is a vector of binary variables for the treatments, including *OrganizationalVisibility*, *NormativeValues*, and *PoliticalInfluence*, and ϵ is the error term.

In additional models, we also include fixed effects for the country in which a CSOs is registered and the CSO type. The random assignment of treatment takes care, in expectation, of any confounders. However, we also control for factors at the CSO-country level in additional models, including the level of GDP (log), a civil society participation index, the vote share in the IMF, and the distance from the CSO country’s capital to Washington, DC. These variables approximate the resources available to CSOs, the constraints and incentives they face in their daily operations, the extent to which they benefit from the status quo, and the salience of the politics of IMF staffing. Further, we conduct heterogeneity analyses where we draw on additional information from the iCSO System. This includes the geographic scope of CSOs’ operations, a variable that takes one of four levels: international; regional; national and local; no information. We also incorporate data on the accreditation status of CSOs in our sample. ECOSOC (2018) regulates accreditation as follows: ‘General status’ is granted to NGOs that represent large segments of societies in several countries. Their area of work covers most of the issues on the agenda of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies. These tend to be fairly large, well-established international NGOs with a broad reach. ‘Special status’ is reserved for NGOs that have a special competence in, and are concerned specifically with, only a few of the activities covered by ECOSOC. These NGOs tend to be smaller and more recently established. ‘Roster status’ is conferred on NGOs with a narrower and/or

technical focus, and make only occasional contributions to the work of ECOSOC or its subsidiary bodies. We also define dummy variables if CSOs have reported to work on the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) ‘Global Partnership for Sustainable Development’ and if they report English as a working language, respectively. Finally, we classify whether CSOs receive funding from sales of products and services, rely on grants from governments, charge membership dues and fees, or raise funds through public campaigns. These indicators on funding are not mutually exclusive.

To understand whether our sample size is large enough to detect meaningful effects, we conducted a power analysis. We specified meaningful effects based on the most similar study we are aware of: [Riley, Hodgson, Findley and Nielsen \(2019\)](#) contacted 51,000 INGOs to probe whether they would be interested in an independent evaluation of their activities. They attained a response rate of around between 3.5% and 4% per treatment and effect sizes of around 0.3% to 0.7%. Our original list of CSOs included 13,466 organizations with an email address. Assuming all email addresses were valid, we expected to receive around 390 signatures—or between 95 and 100 per treatment group and the pure control (i.e., absence of any treatment). In fact, we received 483 signatories. The number of signatories is approximately 40% higher than a 2021 open letter campaign run by the Bretton Woods Project, which received 280 signatures ([Bretton Woods Project 2021](#)). Our power analysis implied that the minimum detectable effect is around 0.1%—well below the effect sizes attained by the INGO experiment mentioned above ([Riley et al. 2019](#)). Thus, our study is sufficiently powered.

4 Results

4.1 Baseline results from experiment

In Table 1, we present the baseline results of our experiment focusing on whether organizations signed the open letter. Model (1) includes our main pre-registered analysis testing

the impact of our three treatments on organizations' sign-up to the open letter; in Model (2), we also include country and CSO-type fixed effects. Neither model provides support for our hypotheses. The point estimate of the coefficient on organizational visibility is positive, but not statistically significant at conventional thresholds. The estimate of the coefficient on normative values is not significantly different from the control group either. By contrast, the political-influence treatment is marginally statistically significant ($p < 0.10$). Contrary to our hypotheses, however, the coefficient is negative. This indicates that CSOs which received information on the prospective political influence were more reluctant to sign the open letter than organizations that received the control emails referring directly to the open letter.

In Table 1, Models (3) and (4), we probe whether the (null) results are due to similarities in organizations' response to the email invitation or the letter itself. We thus employ our second dependent variable that measures if respondents clicked on the link. Our treatment conditions did not increase link clicks—on the contrary, we see a lower likelihood of clicking the link for all treatment groups, with varied levels of statistical significance.

Taken together, the estimates thus far imply that organizations were most likely to be swayed to campaign for reform of the IMF leader selection process when the contents of the letter were emphasized (in the control group), rather than any additional information or prompts derived from scholarship on CSOs and interest groups—and this is especially true regarding the highlighted opportunity for political influence.²

²In Appendix Tables D1 and D2, we show that the results remain substantively the same when clustering standard errors to correct for heteroskedasticity and when estimating the models using logit instead of ordinary least squares.

Table 1: Pre-registered analysis: Signed letter and clicked link

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0077 (0.0073)	0.0062 (0.0072)	-0.0141 (0.0108)	-0.0182 ⁺ (0.0107)
Normative values	-0.0056 (0.0073)	-0.0069 (0.0073)	-0.0236* (0.0109)	-0.0266* (0.0108)
Political influence	-0.0142 ⁺ (0.0073)	-0.0129 ⁺ (0.0073)	-0.0243* (0.0109)	-0.0234* (0.0108)
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org. type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	8,226	8,226	8,226	8,226
R ²	0.0011	0.0537	0.0008	0.0581
F Statistic	3.1463*	2.5814***	2.1654 ⁺	2.8065***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

What do the findings mean in substantive terms? In Figure 1, we display predicted sign-up and click rates with 95% confidence intervals. The predicted mean probability of signing the open letter (Model 1) for the control group is 6.2%. This number raises to 6.9% for the group that was treated with the visibility prompt, although as discussed above, the differences are not statistically significant. By contrast, the mean sign-up rate for CSOs exposed to prompts about the potential for political influence was merely 4.7%.³ With regard to clicks, we find that the mean predicted probability for the control group was 15.8% for the control group; 14.4% for CSOs treated with organizational visibility; and 13.4% for the last two treatments.

³We note that the confidence intervals and underlying tests in the coefficient plot differs from our regression analysis. In Table 1, we test for difference in means between treatment and control group; in Figure 1, we display uncertainty surrounding the predicted mean.

Figure 1: Predicted mean outcomes



Notes: Predicted mean values of signing the letter and clicking the link, respectively. Estimates from Table 1, Models 1 and 3.

Before unpacking these null results, we address a potential concern about our randomization. In Appendix Table D3, we predict treatment assignment as a function of five key characteristics of the CSOs in our sample: their geographic scope (international; regional; national and local); their accreditation status (General; Special; Roster; None); whether they work on development (as approximated by listing the SDG Global partnership for development as part of their mandate); whether they reported English as a working language; and four non-exclusive sources of funding (from sales of products and services; grants from governments; membership dues; and funding from the public). The results indicate that our randomization worked by and large; CSOs with a regional or national/local geographic scope are slightly underrepresented in the normative-values and political-influence treatment groups, respectively. In these models, we also control for a series of factors at the CSO-country level, all of which are not significantly different from zero: GDP (log), civil society participation, voting shares in the IMF, and distance from the national capital to Washington, DC (km).

In Appendix E, we also incorporate the data on the characteristics of CSOs into heterogeneity analyses. Space constraints do not allow us to discuss these at length here. Suffice it to say that the point estimates of the coefficients of interest—our three treatments—are not sensitive to the inclusion of controls for these characteristics of CSOs, as reported in Table E1. Further, the main findings are mostly driven by the groups of CSOs that are over-represented in the UN iCSO database, e.g., national and locally-oriented CSOs or those without formal consultative status in the UN.

4.2 Visibility drove sign-ups among CSOs interested in the letter

The three main treatments did not encourage sign-ups on average (as indicated by the results in Table 1). However, they may have motivated a more heterogeneous group of CSOs to join the campaign than otherwise. That is, the perspectives on what motivates CSO lobbying may work less as competing expectations for the behavior of CSOs. Instead, they could explain the behavior of *different* CSOs. In the aggregated sample, these differences

could even out. In the following, we probe this conjecture through additional exploratory analyses.

In a first step, we try to understand whether CSOs that received different email treatments behaved differently once they read the open letter. This analysis is particularly relevant for the visibility treatment. We would expect that CSOs primarily interested in visibility see more instrumental benefits from the letter. Signing the letter is a three-step process: Respondents click on the link, read the letter, and then decide to sign it (or not). Organizations primarily interested in visibility are most likely to participate in a campaign if the letter is on a salient topic, the reputation of the organization in charge of the campaign is favorable, and if the letter is consistent with the organization's mandate. These features are relatively independent of the content of the letter. Thus, they can decide on signing the letter in step one—without engaging with the content of the letter in detail.

To understand how the treatment conditions affected engagement with the contents of the letter, we estimate the effect of our treatments on signatures among those who clicked on the link. The results, displayed in Table 2, show that organizations treated with visibility arguments were approximately 9% more likely to sign the letter (after they clicked on the link). The coefficient is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Put differently, CSOs that were motivated mainly by visibility were less likely to be dissuaded by the content of the letter.

These findings align with the argument that the motivational perspectives are better thought of as complementary rather than competing perspectives. The visibility treatment emails appear to have prompted a group of CSOs to click on the link and sign the letter that was not captured by the other treatments or control condition. These CSOs appear to have had only a perfunctory interest in the content of the letter and, thus, were less likely to drop out of the campaign after reading the letter.

Table 2: Regression results: Signed letter conditional on click

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Signed letter (conditional on clicked link)	
	(1)	(2)
Organizational visibility	0.0919* (0.0392)	0.0978* (0.0397)
Normative values	0.0269 (0.0400)	0.0215 (0.0401)
Political influence	-0.0353 (0.0403)	-0.0329 (0.0407)
Estimation	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes
Observations	1,174	1,174
R ²	0.0088	0.2057
F Statistic	3.4673*	1.9264***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. +p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

4.3 CSOs broadly highlighted campaign merit

The first exploratory analysis provided some evidence that our treatments may have encouraged CSOs with different motivational profiles to sign the letter; and these nuances may even out in the aggregate analysis. To further probe this argument, we now extend our analysis to incorporate information from open-text responses. After the sign-up, CSOs received a question where we asked them to explain why they signed the letter. We received 381 replies, out of which 342 included valid text responses. For example, one organization wrote that they participated in the campaign ‘[t]o increase the visibility of my organization and above all obtain funding for my organization’s projects.’ The analysis of these open-text responses serves two purposes: First, it allows us to probe whether our treatments did indeed probe the motivations of CSOs. Second, it helps us understand how respondents themselves rationalized their decisions to sign the open letter.

To examine these 342 responses, we manually classified responses into the three motiva-

tional perspectives (organizational visibility, normative values, political influence). For each of the responses, we coded the one type of motivation that dominated the statements, but the three themes are not collectively exhaustive. In total, we assigned any of the three codes to 304 responses. The replies from 38 CSOs fell into a very heterogeneous ‘other’ category. Table 3 lists the three groups, their total number of mentions, and two examples each.

Table 3: Text analysis: Overview of open-text responses

Classification	Total mentions	Example
Visibility & reputation	17	“We signed this letter to have more visibility and also to create a partnership with your NGO to gain more experience.” “As an NGO and civil society organization, we would like to have our voices heard and be visible.”
Normative values	174	“We see this as part of making a fairer global financial system” “I believe in meritocracy in all sectors of our society.”
Political influence & policy advocacy	113	“To get involved and participate in international policy making and know more about the internal working of the IMF” “Because we agree with the reforms that have to take place within the next tenure.”

Notes: 342 CSOs that signed the letter provided a valid response. Out of these, 304 replies were assigned to the codes above; 38 replies were classified as “other” and are not included in the list.

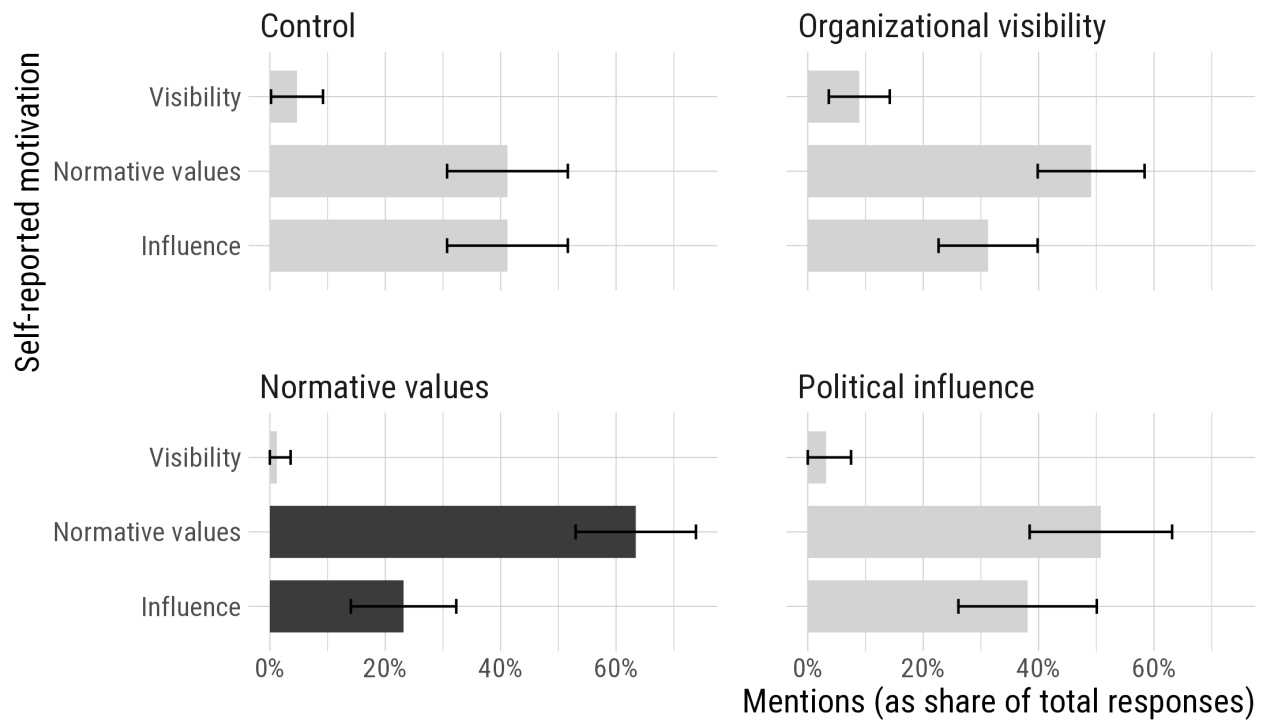
These aggregate numbers allow us to understand the overall motivational profiles of the CSOs that decided to sign the letter. Relatively few organizations discussed visibility and reputation as reason for participating in the campaign. In contrast, more than half of all CSOs that answered the question mentioned normative aspects, e.g., concerns about inequality and fairness. Moreover, about a third of CSOs discussed political and policy advocacy. These patterns could stem from a relatively small number of organizations that were motivated by visibility or from social desirability bias that propelled CSOs to focus mainly on campaign merit.

To better understand these responses, we disaggregate them by treatment group. Specifically, we display the proportion of themes mentioned by treatment group in Figure 2, alongside 95% confidence intervals from a χ^2 test. For all the three treatment conditions, we compare the proportion in self-reported motivations with the share in the control group. The dark bars are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The gray bars indicate that the difference in the proportions between treatment and control group are insignificant.

Two results stand out from this analysis. First, CSOs made extensive reference to normative values or the potential for political influence—both derived from the logic of campaign merit—to explain their decision to participate in our open letter campaign. These factors therefore seemingly mattered for all CSOs, irrespective of the treatment they received. Second, we see that organizations in the normative-values treatment were significantly more likely to justify their participation based on normative values and significantly less likely to rationalize it with arguments emphasizing political influence.

Together, these results suggest, again, that the motivational perspectives are complementary rather than competing. CSOs across the board mentioned similar motivations—irrespective of the treatments they received. Yet, there appears to be a group of CSOs that was more intensely focused on normative values. When receiving emails with normative prompts, these appeared more likely to sign the open letter compared to the control group.

Figure 2: Open-text responses by treatment group



Notes: 304 manually-coded themes from open-text responses displayed by treatment group. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals from a χ^2 test between proportion of respondents mentioning a particular theme in the treatment group vis-à-vis the control group. Dark bars are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

4.4 Changes in the real-world context impacted how CSOs pursue normative values and political influence

The text analysis demonstrates that respondents across the board were interested in campaign merit—normative values and political influence—when signing the open letter. However, the self-reported motivations may be subject to social desirability bias. To address this concern, we leverage a natural experiment that occurred during the study period. The goal of the natural experiment is to probe whether CSOs treated differently also reacted differently to when the real-world context changed. If our interpretation is correct that the theoretical arguments on CSO motivations complement each other, we would expect differential reactions by different groups of CSOs. This natural experiment is exploratory; we did not anticipate the announcement discussed below during our study and, thus, did not pre-register our expectations.

On 12 March, it was widely [reported](#) that the finance ministers of the European Union agreed to support a second term for Kristalina Georgieva as IMF Managing Director. The announcement likely altered the calculus of signing the open letter for CSOs. Specifically, it had three consequences: It likely increased the salience of the topic, decreased the likelihood that the campaign would be successful, and re-emphasized that European leaders wanted to continue the controversial practice.

These three changes have clear implications for the different treatment groups. First, one would expect organizations primarily interested in visibility to be encouraged by the added publicity (and would not be deterred by any potential lower odds for political change). In the days following the European decision, prominent news outlets reported on the announcement: [Reuters](#), [Euronews](#), [Bloomberg](#), or [Politico](#) news stories on the re-election were the top results on Google when searching for ‘IMF Managing Director’. Second, the European endorsement clearly demonstrated that European countries wished to maintain the gentleman’s agreement. The decision therefore reinforced the arguments made in the letter about the inequality and lack of transparency of the current system. In turn, these arguments would imply an

increase, after the announcement, in the sign-up for CSOs exposed to the normative-values treatment. Third, the prospects of change decreased substantially with the announcement. Representatives of organizations that searched for information on the process would have immediately seen that the selection process had been all but decided. This plausibly affects the campaign-merit treatment: organizations would arguably deem political influence less likely and be discouraged from lobbying for reforms.

To examine the effect of the announcement, we convert our cross-sectional data to a panel data set. For each CSO i , our main dependent variable is 0 for all days t on which an organization has not signed up to the open letter, and 1 for the day it signed up. Organizations drop from the sample the day after they signed the letter as multiple sign-ups are not possible.

We then define a ‘Georgieva nomination’ dummy variable which is equal to 1 from day 3 of our campaign onward. We employ CSO fixed effects to account for all differences between CSOs. We do so because the size of CSOs, their location in different time zones, and their differential access to news sources may shape their exposure to the announcement. These fixed effects also control for their assignment to treatment conditions. Moreover, we need to account for the timing of the announcement. Sign-up in any email recruitment campaign is strongest on days that initial emails or reminders are sent—i.e., when organizations receive email and evaluate the demands of a campaign. To ensure that the nomination dummy is not confounded by the timing of reminders, we include fixed effects for our two reminders, and fixed effects holding constant the number of days since the last/most recent reminder.

Table 4 displays the results of the natural experiment. Model 1 displays the interaction between the Georgieva announcement and the organizational-visibility treatment. In Model 2, we interact the Georgieva announcement with the normative-values treatment. Finally, Model 3 includes an interaction between the Georgieva announcement and the political-influence treatment. The main terms of the treatments are absorbed by the CSO fixed effects.

The main term of the Georgieva announcement is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The results show that every day after the announcement, the likelihood that a

given CSO signed the open letter was approximately 0.7% higher than in the period prior to the announcement. This finding is consistent with two interpretations: The increased salience could have increased interest in the visibility of the campaign, or the announcement could have led to normative outrage among NGOs.

Interestingly, the increase in sign-up was considerably more tame among organizations treated with the political-influence messaging. The interaction between the political-influence treatment and the Georgieva announcement is negative and statistically significant. While the effects of the Georgieva announcement were still positive among organizations treated with the political-influence condition, it was reduced by around one-third compared to organizations that did not read messaging emphasizing political influence. These results clearly imply that arguments on the ability of the letter to influence the process lost some potency after the Georgieva announcement.

Table 4: Natural experiment: Signed letter

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Signed letter		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Nomination Georgieva	0.0067*** (0.0018)	0.0067*** (0.0018)	0.0074*** (0.0018)
Nomination Georgieva × Organizational visibility	-0.0001 (0.0013)		
Nomination Georgieva × Normative values		-0.0010 (0.0013)	
Nomination Georgieva × Political influence			-0.0025* (0.0012)
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS
CSO FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Days since reminder FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reminder FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	52,033	51,905	51,395
R ²	0.433	0.429	0.449

Notes: Clustered Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

In sum, the combined weight of the evidence indicates that in practice, the motivational perspectives complement each other. We do not find a statistically significant and positive effect of any of the three treatments (organizational visibility, normative values, political influence) on open letter sign-ups in our pre-registered analysis. However, three exploratory analyses give more context to these findings and imply complementarity. First, we show that there appears to be a sub-group of CSOs that are motivated by visibility—to the point where they seem to sign the letter without engaging with its content. Second, normative values and political influence are central to the motivations voiced by all CSOs. However, a sub-group of CSOs seems to be driven more by normative values and react positively to probes on such values—at least in their justifications. Third, CSOs across all treatment groups react to the announcement by Europeans to continue the gentleman’s agreement with increased sign-up of the letter. Yet, these effects are less pronounced among CSOs exposed to the political-influence treatment. In other words, there appears to be a sub-group of CSOs that is motivated by political influence and this subset is less likely to engage with the campaign once the real-world context lowered the likelihood that the campaign would succeed in reforming the IMF. Although the overall effect of the treatments was not statistically significant, they therefore appear to have increased sign-ups among CSOs with different primary motivations in variegated ways.

5 Conclusion

The last twenty years have seen a remarkable expansion in the access of CSOs to inter-governmental organizations (e.g., [Tallberg et al. 2013, 2014](#)). While we know much about the decisions of these organizations to open up to CSOs, much less research has aimed to understand why activists target intergovernmental organizations. Our paper aimed to fill this gap—with important implications for academia and policy. First, we tested key theories of CSO motivations, thereby focusing on the supply of civil society organizations’ interventions. Second, the research focused on one of the most important international institutions—the International Monetary Fund—and one of its most controversial governance features: the gentleman’s agreement between the United States and European powers that leads to an unrepresentative selection of IMF Managing Directors and World Bank Presidents. To our knowledge, our project is the first systematic effort to study the mobilization of CSOs campaigning to reform a major intergovernmental organization using field experimental methods.

Three findings stand out from our empirical analyses: First, the main theories of CSO motivations have limited explanatory power for participation in an open letter campaign. If anything, messaging that narrowly emphasized the purpose of the open letter campaign outperformed treatments trying to motivate organizations based on extant theories. Second, while treatments may not outperform a short description of the campaign, they can still motivate different types of CSOs. Third, real world events undermining the potential effectiveness of campaigns may dissuade influence-minded CSOs, but can still motivate a broader coalition of CSOs to advocate for change.

We note two important limitations of our project. On the one hand, we rely on civil society organizations’ own efforts to register with the UN iCSO system. We do not have any information on whether the sample of organizations included in our study is representative of the global population of CSOs. Yet we believe that the absolute number of organizations and the fact that the IMF (and the World Bank) are part of the UN system justifies our

choice. On the other hand, the sample size restricts the number of explanations we could test, due to concerns about the statistical power of our analysis. Securing the longevity of an organization, normative values, and the opportunity to exercise political influence are undoubtedly important drivers of CSO engagement with intergovernmental organizations, as per the pertinent scholarship in international relations (e.g., [Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017](#); [Steffek 2013](#); [Tallberg et al. 2018](#); [Vikberg 2020](#)). There may be other drivers, and we leave their study to future research.

These limitations notwithstanding, our study has important implications for debates on global governance and substantial policy relevance. Scholars have focused on the strategies that NGOs can use to lobby international organizations. We contribute to this literature ([Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017](#); [Steffek 2013](#); [Tallberg et al. 2018](#); [Vikberg 2020](#)) by theorizing motivations for CSO lobbying in open letter campaigns and test these motivations in the real world. Our study also introduces a novel methodological approach—a field experiment—to the debate. In doing so, we provide evidence that combines the rigorous internal validity of experimental research with the external validity of field research. These methodological and empirical contributions also contribute to academic debates on civil society in world politics more broadly.

For policymakers, our research helps CSOs plan how they can build more impactful coalitions for change at intergovernmental organizations. Existing campaign efforts are often built on longstanding expertise and practical knowledge. We seek to complement this expertise through a methodologically rigorous analysis of different strategies in a real-world campaign. The evidence we provide is potentially useful for NGOs that seek to systematically evaluate when campaigns are more likely to succeed. Our results indicate the circumstances under which CSOs are (not) likely to be mobilized. We show that while none of the different arguments outperforms others consistently, messages focusing more narrowly on the goal of the campaign appear to fare best. Moreover, our results imply that different types of messaging might be more effective for different types of CSOs. Finally, our results undermine common perceptions

that influence is the only yardstick of activism. While real-world decisions that disrupt the likelihood of influence may have dissuaded those organizations primarily interested in political influence, these organizations are not the majority. On the contrary, CSOs appear to strengthen their activism even when real-world events undermine their potential effectiveness. We believe our findings—theoretically informed, based on experimental methods, and set in the real world—have the potential to help CSOs and policymakers to effect change and address a key source of the Bretton Woods twins’ democratic deficit: the decision-making rules behind the selection of their chief executives.

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A Ethical considerations and pre-registration

The research design for this study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the London School of Economics and Political Science on 21 November 2023; the Boston University Institutional Review Board approved an exemption of IRB approval due to the involvement of civil society organizations, rather than individuals, on 17 May 2023.

All three hypotheses and research design for the baseline analyses (Table 1) were pre-registered on 10 March 2024, prior to conducting the field experiment. For ethical reasons, all hypotheses are framed such that the informational prompts are expected to increase support for the open letter.

B Open letter

Via e-mail

To: IMF Executive Directors

Time to end the ‘gentleman’s agreement’ and select the IMF Managing Director through a merit-based, open and transparent process

With the current term of IMF Managing Director, Kristalina Georgieva, ending in September 2024, the undersigned organisations and individuals write to demand that the IMF use this opportunity to reform the selection process following long-standing calls from global civil society and countries from the Global South and ensure the next selection process is undertaken in accordance with a merit-based, open and transparent process, underpinned by criteria involving a demonstrated commitment to international human rights, feminist principles, green and equitable development, as well as publicly available shareholder votes. The next Managing Director should enjoy the support of the Fund’s membership not only in terms of majority of votes, but also by the majority of member countries, thereby effectively

ending the gentleman's agreement. Moreover, we ask that candidates engage with civil society and under-represented communities and outline their vision of the role and priorities of the IMF in a world mired in systemic crises.

The global post-pandemic outlook is increasingly dire, exacerbated by conflict, the climate crisis, inequality and the debt crisis. International development finance is urgently needed, with 60 per cent of low-income countries already at high risk of or in debt distress while finance needs to address climate change amount to **\$4 trillion annually by 2030**. The need for concessional finance is at an all-time high with lending through the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility increasing five-fold and more than 40 countries expressing interest in the Fund's Resilience and Sustainability Trust since 2022. Yet, the IMF failed to agree to another general allocation of Special Drawing Rights and failed to achieve a meaningful quota reform that would boost the Fund's lending capacity and ensure a fair representation of all member countries. Moreover, the Fund continues to prescribe austerity in its loan conditionalities, advising cuts to government spending, despite overwhelming evidence that fiscal consolidation does not reduce debt-to-GDP ratios or stimulate economic growth.

Amidst an extremely volatile and dynamic geopolitical environment, in which the multi-lateral system is under increasing danger of fragmentation, we call on the next IMF Managing Director to commit to reshaping global economic governance and prioritise policies and systems that are gender transformative, equitable, environmentally sustainable and consistent with international human rights norms, including:

- Demonstrating leadership with shareholders by strongly advocating for a quota reform process that results in a new quota formula by 2025 that accurately reflects the changes in the global economy to ensure a fair representation of all member countries and boosts IMF's lending capacity.
- Strongly supporting and advocating for a new Special Drawing Rights allocation to help meet urgent financing needs for developing countries in ways that do not create additional debt burdens and undue policy conditionality as well as reform future

allocations by using clearly defined criteria, and decoupling SDRs from quotas to ensure their targeted, needs-based and equitable distribution.

- Promoting progressive taxation, reforms to eradicate illicit financial flows, relocate public expenditures and support sustainable debt resolution instead of austerity conditionality.
- Actively advocating for the end of the Fund's unnecessary and counterproductive surcharges policy.
- Energetically advocate for the establishment of an IMF human rights policy and the *ex ante* and *ex post* human rights and distributional impact of all IMF policies and programmes.
- Committing to bringing the IMF in line with other international financial institutions by establishing an IMF independent accountability mechanism.

Sincerely, the undersigned:

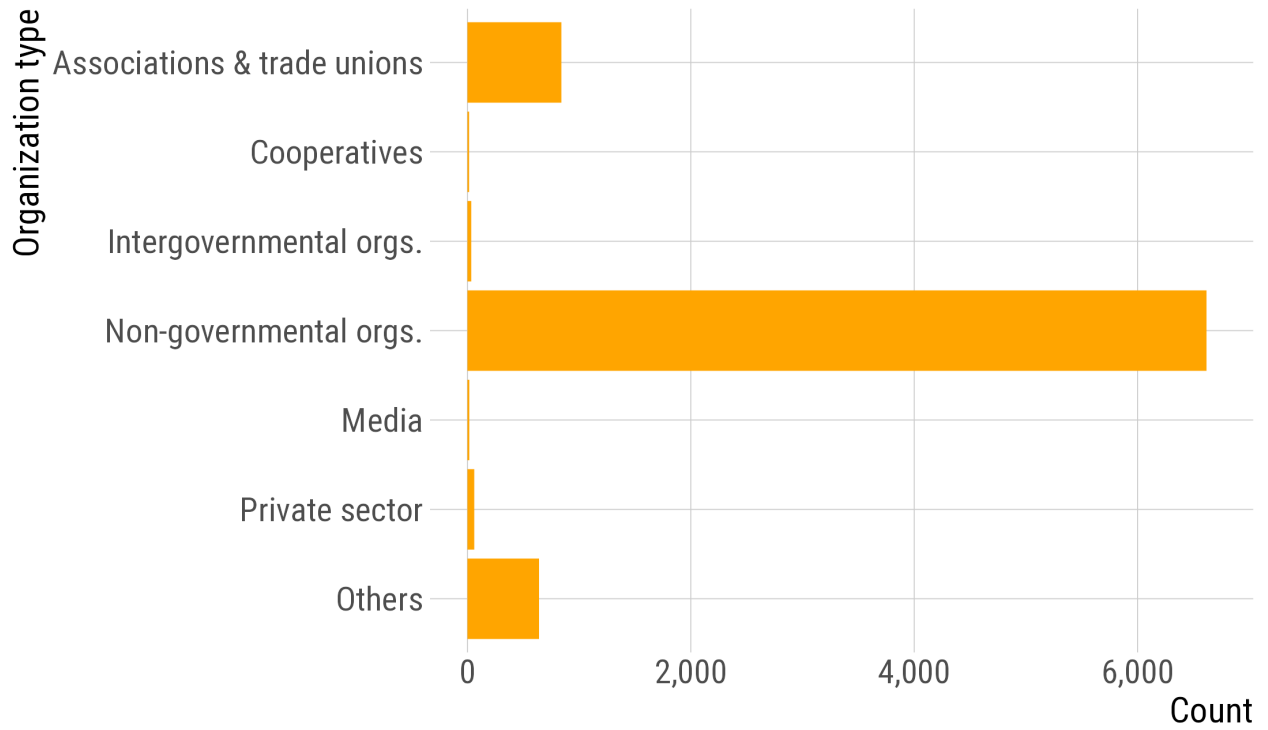
C Overview of our sample

In Figure C1, we display the number of organizations in our sample by seven different types, drawing on the United Nations integrated Civil Society Organization (iCSO) System.⁴ As mentioned in the main body of the manuscript, a total of 13,466 CSOs out of 14,757 organizations in the iCSO System listed an email address. However, we were only able to reach only 8,254, of which 8,226 allowed us to use their participation in our study. By far the largest group are non-governmental organizations; we were able to contact 6,617 NGOs. This large share of NGOs is reassuring to the extent that our theoretical predictions are derived primarily from scholarship focusing on NGOs, although we believe they speak to the larger universe of CSOs.

In Figure C2, we examine the geographic distribution of our sample (as reported by the organizations themselves). Accordingly, the CSOs are located in 169 distinct countries. The most prominent location is the United States (1,373 CSOs; 1,172 NGOs), followed by Nigeria (714 CSOs; 596 NGOs), India (322 CSOs; 282 NGOs), United Kingdom (295 CSOs; 260 NGOs), Switzerland (255 CSOs; 203 NGOs), Cameroon (242 CSOs; 152 NGOs), and Ghana (213 CSOs; 183 NGOs). We provide this information primarily to understand our data, rather than out of concern about the validity of our inference. To be sure, organizations based in the United States may be more likely to act on the motivation to influence the IMF and the World Bank given their close proximity to Washington, DC. However, due to the randomization of control and treatments, we do not think this is cause for concern. In addition, we also control for the distance between a country's capital and Washington, DC, in robustness checks.

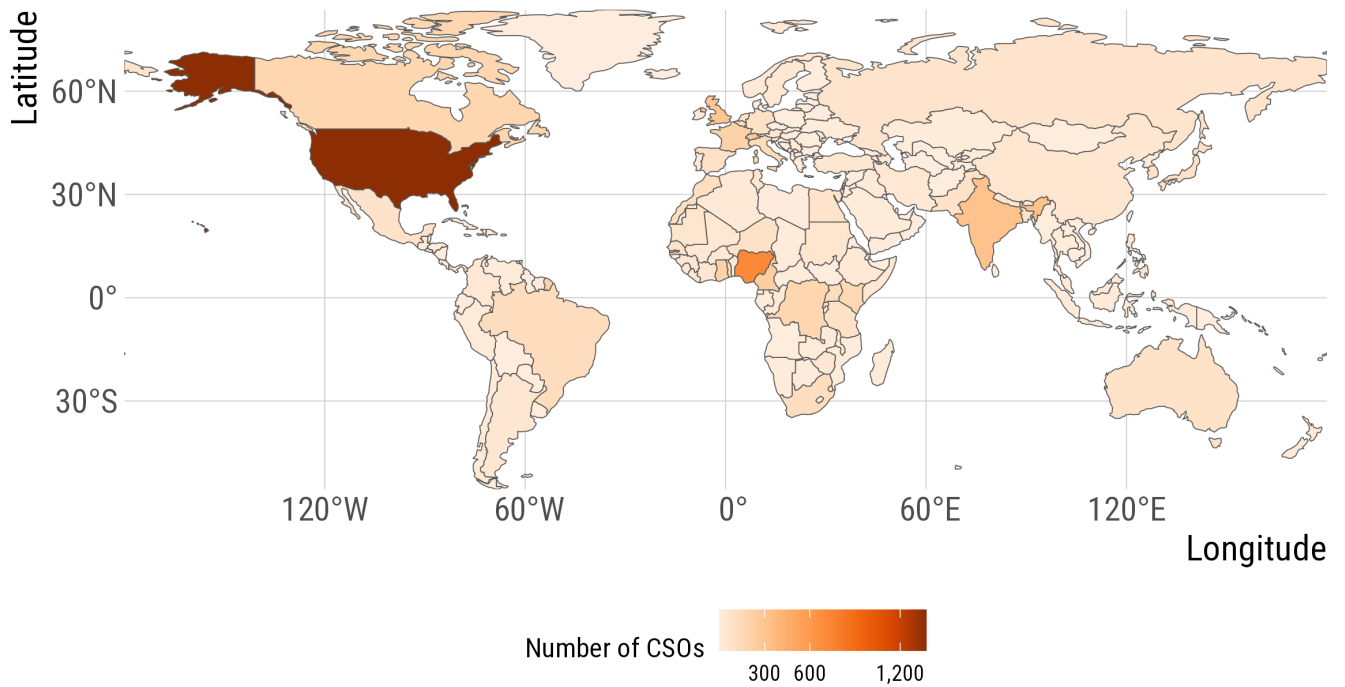
⁴The UN iCSO system classifies organizations into 15 mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive groups. For ease of reading, we aggregate these types as follows: Associations & trade unions (association; foundation; trade union); Cooperatives (cooperative); Intergovernmental orgs. (intergovernmental organization); Non-governmental orgs. (non-governmental organization); Media (media); Private sector (private sector); Others (other; academics; indigenous people organizations; disability, development, and rights organization; open-ended working group on ageing; institution; local government).

Figure C1: Sample by organization type



Notes: Sample of organizations registered with the United Nations integrated Civil Society Organization (iCSO) system that have a valid email address and are included in our final sample, as per November 2022.

Figure C2: Sample by organization type



Notes: Map depicts the country in which CSOs in our sample are located, as self-reported by the organizations in the UN iCSO System.

D Additional models

Table D1: Baseline analysis: Robust standard errors

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0077 (0.0077)	0.0062 (0.0076)	-0.0141 (0.0111)	-0.0182 ⁺ (0.0109)
Normative values	-0.0056 (0.0073)	-0.0069 (0.0073)	-0.0236* (0.0110)	-0.0266* (0.0109)
Political influence	-0.0142* (0.0071)	-0.0129 ⁺ (0.0070)	-0.0243* (0.0110)	-0.0234* (0.0109)
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	8,226	8,226	8,226	8,226
R ²	0.0011	0.0537	0.0008	0.0581
F Statistic	3.1463*	2.5814***	2.1654 ⁺	2.8065***

Notes: Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table D2: Baseline analysis: Logit estimation

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.1264 (0.1254)	0.1078 (0.1306)	-0.1101 (0.0866)	-0.1525 ⁺ (0.0902)
Normative values	-0.1005 (0.1322)	-0.1250 (0.1371)	-0.1891* (0.0882)	-0.2266* (0.0916)
Political influence	-0.2765* (0.1390)	-0.2629 ⁺ (0.1436)	-0.1951* (0.0889)	-0.1993* (0.0924)
Estimation	Logit	Logit	Logit	Logit
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	8,226	8,226	8,226	8,226
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3,674.2	3,585.6	6,744.7	6,632.6

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table D3: Balance checks: Predicting treatment assignment

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Org. visibility	Normative values	Political influence
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Geographic scope: National	-0.0063 (0.0295)	-0.0498 ⁺ (0.0291)	-0.0634* (0.0290)
Geographic scope: Regional	-0.0522 (0.0407)	-0.0734 ⁺ (0.0404)	-0.0782 ⁺ (0.0402)
Accreditation: General	0.2146 ⁺ (0.1281)	-0.0480 (0.1797)	0.1730 (0.1167)
Accreditation: Special	-0.0002 (0.0251)	-0.0113 (0.0248)	-0.0558* (0.0253)
Accreditation: Roster	-0.0466 (0.1090)	0.0592 (0.0971)	0.0929 (0.0935)
SDG: Global partnership for development	0.0113 (0.0252)	0.0149 (0.0252)	0.0157 (0.0254)
Language: English	0.0377 (0.0319)	0.0094 (0.0316)	0.0227 (0.0318)
Funding: Sales from products and services	-0.0330 (0.0257)	-0.0385 (0.0256)	-0.0137 (0.0252)
Funding: Grants from governments	0.0092 (0.0277)	0.0194 (0.0277)	0.0255 (0.0282)
Funding: Membership dues	0.0264 (0.0247)	0.0434 ⁺ (0.0247)	0.0326 (0.0248)
Funding: Public sources	0.0090 (0.0276)	0.0185 (0.0274)	0.0304 (0.0278)
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	No	No
Org.type FEs	No	No	No
Conrols	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,014	2,007	1,971
R ²	0.0052	0.0063	0.0114
F Statistic	0.6952	0.8410	1.5071 ⁺

Notes: In each of the above models, our dependent variable is an indicator variable equal to 1 if a CSO was allocated to a particular treatment, and 0 for the control group. Reference group for geographic scope is ‘International’; reference group for accreditation is ‘None’; all other variables are dummies. Controls, all statistically insignificant and at the country-level, include: GDP (log), civil society participation, voting shares in the IMF, distance to DC (km). Robust standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

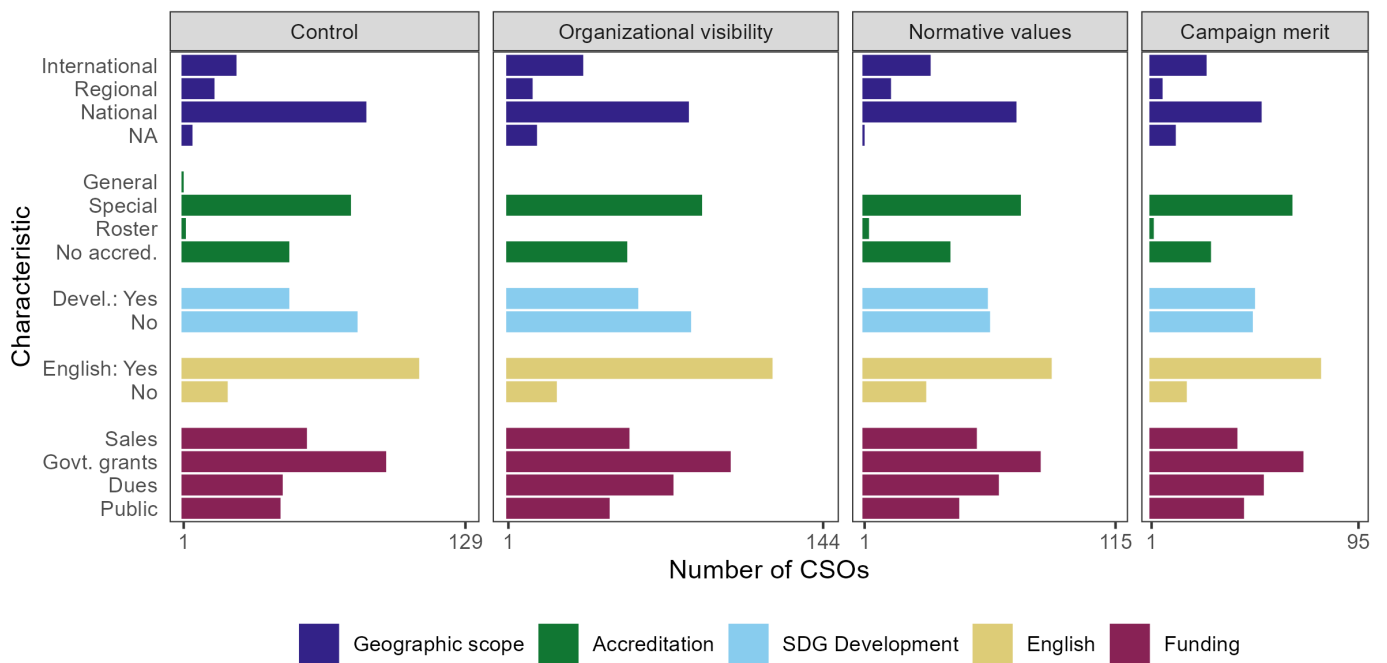
E Heterogeneity analysis

As discussed in the manuscript, the UN iCSO System also includes additional information that CSOs can self-report, including on their geographical focus, their accreditation status, policy area, language, and funding sources. As reported in Table E1, our point estimates of interest are not substantively different when including controls for the characteristics of CSOs in our sample.

In Tables E2-E16, we run sub-samples for the different groups of CSOs. In terms of geographic focus of the CSOs, we find that our baseline results are primarily driven by national and locally-oriented CSOs, to a lesser extent by regional ones, but not international CSOs (Tables E2-E4). In addition, we do not see that accreditation matters significantly. In fact, our findings are due to the largest group of CSOs—those who do not have formal consultative status in the UN (Tables E5-E8). We further find CSOs that do not work on development (Tables E9 and E10) and that are English-speaking (Tables E11 and E12) drive our estimates. Finally, no strong patterns regarding funding sources emerge—except for CSOs that charge membership dues (Table E15). We estimate that this group of organizations is 4% more likely than the control group to have signed the open letter when exposed to the organizational visibility treatment ($p < 1\%$). This dynamic, albeit only observed on a specific subsample, is consistent with our hypothesis according to which CSOs are motivated by the logic of survival. Put differently, being seen to actively engage in political action seems to be of concern for CSOs that charge membership fees.

So what do the CSOs that ended up participating in our open letter campaign look like? In Figure E1, we display the number and shares of CSOs with a particular characteristic, disaggregated by treatment exposure. For instance, amongst the CSOs that were in the control group, 25 CSOs that work internationally signed the open letter, reflecting 3.2% of all international CSOs in the control group. Overall, 129 CSOs in the control group signed the letter; the sign-up numbers in the treatment groups range from 95 (political influence) to 144 (organizational visibility).

Figure E1: Characteristics of CSOs that signed the open letter



Notes: Bars display the absolute number of CSOs with a certain characteristic (y-axis) and in a given treatment group (facet) that signed the open letter.

Table E1: Additional CSO characteristics: Signed letter and clicked link

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0039 (0.0079)	0.0031 (0.0078)	-0.0153 (0.0116)	-0.0194 ⁺ (0.0115)
Normative values	-0.0048 (0.0079)	-0.0058 (0.0079)	-0.0219 ⁺ (0.0116)	-0.0237* (0.0115)
Political influence	-0.0197* (0.0080)	-0.0191* (0.0079)	-0.0245* (0.0117)	-0.0251* (0.0116)
Geographic scope: National	0.0485*** (0.0062)	0.0048 (0.0073)	0.0716*** (0.0091)	0.0049 (0.0107)
Geographic scope: Regional	0.0253* (0.0101)	-0.0018 (0.0107)	0.0671*** (0.0148)	0.0202 (0.0156)
Accreditation: General	-0.0152 (0.0227)	0.0216 (0.0230)	0.0337 (0.0333)	0.0854* (0.0337)
Accreditation: Roster	-0.0140 (0.0139)	0.0337* (0.0146)	0.0086 (0.0204)	0.0701** (0.0214)
Accreditation: Special	0.0153* (0.0064)	0.0475*** (0.0072)	0.0617*** (0.0094)	0.1029*** (0.0106)
SDG: Global partnership for development	0.0217*** (0.0063)	0.0159* (0.0063)	0.0278** (0.0093)	0.0206* (0.0093)
Language: English	-0.0240** (0.0090)	-0.0127 (0.0101)	-0.0490*** (0.0132)	-0.0269 ⁺ (0.0148)
Funding: Sales from products and services	0.0195** (0.0065)	0.0135* (0.0066)	0.0208* (0.0096)	0.0144 (0.0096)
Funding: Grants from governments	-0.0029 (0.0069)	-0.0032 (0.0069)	-0.0051 (0.0101)	-0.0109 (0.0102)
Funding: Membership dues	0.0158** (0.0061)	0.0073 (0.0063)	0.0367*** (0.0090)	0.0207* (0.0092)
Funding: Public sources	0.0128 ⁺ (0.0068)	0.0111 (0.0068)	0.0304** (0.0100)	0.0292** (0.0100)
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	7,264	7,264	7,264	7,264
R ²	0.0212	0.0737	0.0282	0.0848
F Statistic	11.1924***	3.0291***	15.0405***	3.5256***

Notes: Reference group for geographic scope is ‘International’; reference group for accreditation is ‘None’; all other variables are dummies. Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E2: Geographic scope: International

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0131 (0.0095)	0.0131 (0.0094)	0.0024 (0.0160)	-0.0008 (0.0161)
Normative values	0.0077 (0.0095)	0.0030 (0.0094)	-0.0008 (0.0160)	-0.0091 (0.0161)
Political influence	0.0008 (0.0094)	-0.0045 (0.0094)	0.0070 (0.0159)	-0.0012 (0.0160)
Sample	Geographic scope: International			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	3,169	3,169	3,169	3,169
R ²	0.0008	0.1005	0.0001	0.0713
F Statistic	0.8506	2.3977***	0.0997	1.6481***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E3: Geographic scope: Regional

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	-0.0067 (0.0263)	0.0117 (0.0285)	-0.0186 (0.0406)	-0.0219 (0.0429)
Normative values	-0.0025 (0.0261)	-0.0152 (0.0287)	-0.0112 (0.0403)	-0.0298 (0.0432)
Political influence	-0.0432 ⁺ (0.0262)	-0.0323 (0.0284)	-0.0748 ⁺ (0.0404)	-0.0733 ⁺ (0.0428)
Sample	Geographic scope: Regional			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	699	699	699	699
R ²	0.0050	0.2145	0.0057	0.2546
F Statistic	1.1549	1.2044 ⁺	1.3164	1.5062***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E4: Geographic scope: National and local

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0046 (0.0155)	-0.0008 (0.0158)	-0.0286 (0.0214)	-0.0390 ⁺ (0.0216)
Normative values	-0.0108 (0.0157)	-0.0086 (0.0161)	-0.0477* (0.0216)	-0.0467* (0.0220)
Political influence	-0.0277 ⁺ (0.0161)	-0.0262 (0.0165)	-0.0411 ⁺ (0.0221)	-0.0379 ⁺ (0.0225)
Sample	Geographic scope: National and local			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org. type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	2,571	2,571	2,571	2,571
R ²	0.0019	0.0800	0.0022	0.0932
F Statistic	1.6042	1.3267**	1.8931	1.5690***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E5: Accreditation: General

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	-0.0286 (0.0241)	-0.0532 ⁺ (0.0303)	-0.0333 (0.0771)	-0.0683 (0.0893)
Normative values	-0.0286 (0.0233)	-0.0315 (0.0287)	-0.2000** (0.0745)	-0.1974* (0.0846)
Political influence	-0.0286 (0.0218)	-0.0556 ⁺ (0.0281)	-0.1714* (0.0696)	-0.1308 (0.0827)
Sample	Accreditation: General			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	121	121	121	121
R ²	0.0205	0.2056	0.0837	0.3688
F Statistic	0.8153	0.5806	3.5640*	1.3107

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E6: Accreditation: Special

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0113 (0.0107)	0.0086 (0.0104)	0.0023 (0.0160)	-0.0020 (0.0156)
Normative values	-0.0044 (0.0106)	-0.0077 (0.0104)	-0.0105 (0.0159)	-0.0115 (0.0156)
Political influence	-0.0075 (0.0108)	-0.0063 (0.0105)	-0.0045 (0.0162)	-0.0017 (0.0158)
Sample	Accreditation: Special			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	4,436	4,436	4,436	4,436
R ²	0.0008	0.1147	0.0002	0.1101
F Statistic	1.1758	3.4166***	0.2504	3.2636***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E7: Accreditation: Roster

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	-0.0200 (0.0197)	-0.0145 (0.0186)	-0.0562 (0.0402)	-0.0754 ⁺ (0.0411)
Normative values	0.0145 (0.0201)	-0.0103 (0.0195)	-0.0180 (0.0409)	-0.0426 (0.0430)
Political influence	0.0030 (0.0201)	0.0037 (0.0193)	-0.0295 (0.0409)	-0.0458 (0.0427)
Sample	Accreditation: Roster			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	367	367	367	367
R ²	0.0081	0.3753	0.0056	0.2646
F Statistic	0.9933	2.9463***	0.6823	1.7645***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E8: Accreditation: None

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0064 (0.0108)	0.0090 (0.0111)	-0.0301* (0.0153)	-0.0240 (0.0155)
Normative values	-0.0096 (0.0109)	-0.0072 (0.0112)	-0.0372* (0.0154)	-0.0349* (0.0156)
Political influence	-0.0244* (0.0109)	-0.0221* (0.0111)	-0.0433** (0.0154)	-0.0392* (0.0156)
Sample	Accreditation: None			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	3,302	3,302	3,302	3,302
R ²	0.0027	0.0546	0.0028	0.0690
F Statistic	2.9996*	1.2126*	3.1112*	1.5561***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E9: SDG: Global partnership for development

Organizational visibility	0.0174 (0.0152)	0.0132 (0.0153)	-0.0001 (0.0212)	-0.0083 (0.0214)
Normative values	0.0138 (0.0152)	0.0077 (0.0153)	-0.0197 (0.0213)	-0.0267 (0.0214)
Political influence	-0.0013 (0.0152)	-0.0065 (0.0154)	-0.0238 (0.0212)	-0.0357 ⁺ (0.0215)
Sample	SDG: Global partnership for development			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	2,609	2,609	2,609	2,609
R ²	0.0009	0.0929	0.0008	0.0951
F Statistic	0.7859	1.6328***	0.7114	1.6752***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E10: SDG: *not* Global partnership for development

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0033 (0.0080)	0.0023 (0.0080)	-0.0205 ⁺ (0.0124)	-0.0244* (0.0124)
Normative values	-0.0144 ⁺ (0.0080)	-0.0155 ⁺ (0.0080)	-0.0254* (0.0124)	-0.0302* (0.0124)
Political influence	-0.0208* (0.0081)	-0.0186* (0.0081)	-0.0254* (0.0126)	-0.0239 ⁺ (0.0125)
Sample	SDG: <i>not</i> Global partnership for development			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	5,617	5,617	5,617	5,617
R ²	0.0022	0.0594	0.0010	0.0649
F Statistic	4.0444**	2.0001***	1.8949	2.1954***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E11: Language: English

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0074 (0.0077)	0.0054 (0.0077)	-0.0150 (0.0116)	-0.0187 (0.0115)
Normative values	-0.0118 (0.0077)	-0.0121 (0.0077)	-0.0288* (0.0116)	-0.0303** (0.0115)
Political influence	-0.0151+ (0.0078)	-0.0140+ (0.0077)	-0.0246* (0.0117)	-0.0227+ (0.0116)
Sample	Language: English			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	7,013	7,013	7,013	7,013
R ²	0.0015	0.0609	0.0010	0.0639
F Statistic	3.5925*	2.5207***	2.4184+	2.6506***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. +p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E12: Language: *not* English

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0099 (0.0211)	0.0108 (0.0223)	-0.0079 (0.0301)	-0.0075 (0.0310)
Normative values	0.0314 (0.0212)	0.0206 (0.0224)	0.0083 (0.0302)	-0.0001 (0.0312)
Political influence	-0.0090 (0.0212)	-0.0102 (0.0223)	-0.0220 (0.0302)	-0.0219 (0.0310)
Sample	Language: <i>not</i> English			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	1,213	1,213	1,213	1,213
R ²	0.0032	0.1023	0.0009	0.1459
F Statistic	1.3095	1.0091	0.3536	1.5130***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. +p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E13: Funding: Sales from products and services

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0039 (0.0160)	0.0035 (0.0161)	-0.0168 (0.0221)	-0.0234 (0.0223)
Normative values	-0.0075 (0.0158)	-0.0019 (0.0160)	-0.0309 (0.0218)	-0.0294 (0.0220)
Political influence	-0.0229 (0.0160)	-0.0206 (0.0161)	-0.0142 (0.0221)	-0.0145 (0.0223)
Sample	Funding: Sales from products and services			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	2,425	2,425	2,425	2,425
R ²	0.0013	0.0987	0.0008	0.1047
F Statistic	1.0698	1.6606***	0.6734	1.7726***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E14: Funding: Grants from governments

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0091 (0.0104)	0.0070 (0.0103)	-0.0135 (0.0150)	-0.0173 (0.0148)
Normative values	-0.0116 (0.0102)	-0.0110 (0.0102)	-0.0303* (0.0148)	-0.0312* (0.0147)
Political influence	-0.0170 (0.0104)	-0.0159 (0.0103)	-0.0257+ (0.0150)	-0.0239 (0.0149)
Sample	Funding: Grants from governments			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	4,912	4,912	4,912	4,912
R ²	0.0016	0.0709	0.0010	0.0801
F Statistic	2.5413 ⁺	2.1801***	1.6708	2.4903***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E15: Funding: Membership dues

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0397** (0.0141)	0.0374** (0.0142)	0.0063 (0.0201)	-0.0049 (0.0200)
Normative values	0.0226 (0.0142)	0.0181 (0.0143)	-0.0157 (0.0202)	-0.0268 (0.0203)
Political influence	0.0086 (0.0141)	0.0121 (0.0143)	-0.0205 (0.0202)	-0.0197 (0.0202)
Sample	Funding: Membership dues			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	2,946	2,946	2,946	2,946
R ²	0.0031	0.0854	0.0008	0.1006
F Statistic	3.0327*	1.6920***	0.7914	2.0280***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. +p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table E16: Funding: Public sources

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Signed letter		Clicked link	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Organizational visibility	0.0035 (0.0166)	0.0012 (0.0165)	0.0125 (0.0238)	-0.0023 (0.0237)
Normative values	-0.0042 (0.0165)	-0.0103 (0.0166)	-0.0054 (0.0237)	-0.0141 (0.0237)
Political influence	-0.0062 (0.0164)	-0.0041 (0.0165)	0.0029 (0.0236)	-0.0025 (0.0236)
Sample	Funding: Public sources			
Estimation	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Org.type FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	2,207	2,207	2,207	2,207
R ²	0.0002	0.1249	0.0003	0.1332
F Statistic	0.1396	1.9283***	0.2004	2.0774***

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. +p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001