

# Pre-Analysis Plan: Foreign Aid’s Impact on the Demand Side of Civil Society\*

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February 1, 2019<sup>‡</sup>

## Abstract

The democracy assistance literature has looked at the impact of donor preferences and funding patterns on nongovernmental organizations in recipient countries — the supply side of foreign aid. A significant interest of the foreign aid literature has been to investigate the relationship between citizens’ views of their government’s legitimacy and the receipt of foreign aid, pulling into focus the impact of foreign aid on the demand side in terms of governance. This paper presents an analysis plan for a project that seeks to unite these two strands of the literature by turning to the demand side of civil society, and how it is impacted by foreign aid. Civil society has been theorized as being a crucial component of democracy and a crucial actor in democratic development. However, we do not know how citizen attitudes toward civil society may have been altered by foreign aid. I posit that the more foreign a civil society organization is perceived as being by aid recipients, the less likely they will be to want to engage directly with it, although they may expect the organization itself to be better suited to bringing developments to their community. I test this theory using a conjoint survey experiment carried out on Malawian market vendors who are the target of a large-scale USAID intervention. The findings will have important implications for how foreign aid might impact citizen engagement in a way that has not been captured before.

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\*I would like to thank Lucy Martin, Graeme Robertson, Sean Norton, Brian Overington, Cole Harvey, Silviya Nitsova, and Jacob Smith for their feedback and advice on this project and pre-analysis plan. Errors are my own.

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<sup>‡</sup>This pre-analysis plan was first drafted before the survey was carried out but was not completed until the survey had been carried out. It was submitted before the data became available.

# 1 Introduction

Both theoretical and empirical works have posited that civil society is necessary for democracy, for effective governance, and for economic success either because it represents a space where pro-democratic ideas can be exchanged and values conveyed or because it is inhabited by organizations that allow individuals to interact with their peers and with the government and thereby hold the government accountable (Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens, 1992; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Diamond, 1999; Warren, 2001; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2005; Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). Building on these theories, scholars and policy makers came to argue that a robust civil society is necessary for successful development. Because of the hypothesized connection between civil society and democracy and development, donors since the early 1990s have attempted to strengthen civil society—usually as “a means to an end” (Howell and Pearce, 2001, 117). As such, they pursued policies that involved extending aid directly to organizations so that these could then carry out diverse tasks to improve development outcomes, both economic and political.

Assessments of these efforts have shown that they have had inconclusive results at best (Ottaway and Carothers, 2000; Howell and Pearce, 2001; Mendelson and Glenn, 2002; Henderson, 2003; Ishkanian, 2008). Out of these investigations, however, came the realization that while foreign aid was not able to strengthen civil society in the theorized ways, this did not mean that civil society — and the civil society organizations and individuals that inhabit it — went unaffected. Instead, these studies found that organizations that received outside funding were disconnected from organizations that did not receive funding and from the societies they purported to represent. Further work found that organizations in foreign aid recipient countries changed in organization and programming in order to accommodate donor preferences (Bush, 2015) and that this funding pattern could have destabilizing effects even on organizations that did not seek outside funding (Aksartova, 2009).

What this literature does not directly address is the fact that civil society needs individual engagement. Although most definitions of civil society focus — too much so — on

organizations, civil society is defined by the interaction of individuals (Malena and Heinrich, 2007). Participatory development, a form of foreign aid in which donors and aid organizations attempt to empower individuals to hold governments accountable – in effect attempting to promote civil society without the use of organizations – more directly involves individuals. Reviews of participatory development show that it has inconclusive results (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). Yet, these studies do not look at the impact — positive or negative — of participatory development on civil society organizations or attitudes toward civil society organizations.

Most of the work on civil society in the realm of development has thus looked only at the organizations — or a certain subset of them — that inhabit the civil society space, not the social base for that space, or the connection between that social base and these organizations. The literature has established that foreign aid impacts the civil society of countries in unexpected ways. How then does foreign aid directed at civil society impact how individuals interact with and view civil society, and do the changes in civil societies bear consequences for what civil society can be expected to accomplish in these states, both in the push for political change and after such change has been accomplished?

A separate strand of the foreign aid literature *has* examined individual attitudes, focusing on how foreign aid impacts perception of government legitimacy at the individual level (Dietrich and Winters, 2015; Dietrich, Mahmud and Winters, 2018; Findley, Harris, Milner and Nielson, 2017; Milner, Nielson and Findley, 2015). These studies show that, for the most part, individuals in foreign aid recipient countries prefer foreign aid when it is delivered by a third party, not their governments, although foreign aid in general does not seem to undermine their belief in their government’s legitimacy. Although some works here (e.g. Montinola and Taylor (2018)) do bring civil society organizations into their studies, overall they skirt the fact that civil society organizations often play an interlocutor role between individuals and states – and not just in development. In short, the civil society promotion literature focuses almost exclusively on the organizations (with warnings of implications for

citizen engagement), while the foreign aid attitudes literature focuses almost exclusively on the individuals. Neither, therefore, gets at individual preferences about the organizations that replace government services, nor does it investigate different types of organizations.

This project acknowledges the important role civil society organizations play in development while at the same time turning the focus to how individuals engage with these organizations. More importantly, this project aims to see whether foreign aid—by starting, funding, and working through CSOs—impacts how the social base for civil society perceives civil society organizations and how this base seeks to interact with civil society organizations. Are more “foreign” organizations treated differently by individuals than more familiar ones? I aim to answer these questions via a choice-based conjoint experiment embedded in a survey of Malawian market vendors who are also the subject of a randomized control trial (RCT) impact evaluation of a foreign aid program that bundles together participatory development type interventions and aid to civil society organizations that represent market vendor interests.

This has important implications for continuing democratic, economic, and civic development in developing countries and among foreign aid recipients. This is especially true because donors are more likely to bypass governments and funnel money to civil society organizations and other non-state actors in weak-state contexts (Dietrich, 2013), contexts in which stronger civil society may be more necessary for successful development. In addition, evidence shows that donors do not give aid to organizations more “embedded” in local contexts, which means that more “foreign” organizations are receiving funds from donors (Suárez and Gugerty, 2016).

I first review the literature on how foreign assistance has changed the nature of civil society organizations. I next turn to the literatures on government legitimacy in order to clarify the angle I aim to take on civil society. I then lay out my expectations for how foreign aid may affect attitudes toward civil society. Finally, I present the research design by describing the conjoint experiment and discuss the limitations inherent in the available

data.

## 2 The Impact of Foreign Aid on Civil Society

Civil society as a concept reappeared in the discourse around democratization and development toward the end of the 1980s, when it was used to underscore the absence of genuine associational cultures in Eastern Europe, and how various movements against the USSR represented a change on this front and at the same time personified challenges to autocratic governments (Gellner, 1994; Howell and Pearce, 2001). Since then, various conceptualizations of civil society have been proposed and applied. In development — including democracy assistance — donors and scholars have tended to define civil society along functional lines, ascribing organizations within the civil society space with certain roles and a certain mode of engagement with the state based mainly in the Tocquevillean understanding of civil society as a place for private organizations. In this sense, civil society can be defined as the space that exists between the market, the state, and the family that is filled by organizations that serve to balance and check the state (Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens, 1992; Diamond, 1999), and that help instill democratic values by facilitating interactions between individual and thereby creating social trust (Putnam, 1993). In this understanding of civil society, civil society is a force for “good.”

### 2.1 Civil Society Organizations

Donors seemed drawn to this conceptualization of civil society because it promises a non-political, non-partisan avenue for development (Ottaway and Carothers, 2000; Howell and Pearce, 2001). Western donors also began to become wary of giving aid directly to governments and sought to funnel aid to those who needed it by “bypassing” state governments (Dietrich, 2013). In this context, aid to civil society can take the form of direct support for civil society activity — seen most often in the realm of democracy assistance — or support for organizations carrying out programs related to health, poverty, etc. — seen most often

under the broader umbrella of development, often in the form of service provision. Building on this understanding of civil society, donors have attempted to bolster civil society in target countries in three main ways: by supporting the institutionalizing of organizations (i.e. professionalization); by establishing “partnerships” between organizations within target countries and within donor states (i.e. network building); and by encouraging financial sustainability by drawing on the populations they support for assistance (Howell and Pearce, 2001).<sup>1</sup>

Given that resource mobilization theory (e.g. McCarthy and Zald (1977)) and political process theory (e.g. Tilly (1978)) posit that organizations that have better access to resources will be more successful, and that other social movements literature explains that more professional organizations will be better able to draw and marshal resources (Staggenborg, 1988), this donor support makes sense. And indeed, although overall the results on this front have been inconclusive, speaking of qualified and somewhat idiosyncratic successes (Ottaway and Carothers, 2000), studies have shown that donor support can have some positive effects. Finkel, Pérez-Liñán and Seligson (2007) find that USAID funding for civil society promotion was statistically associated with an increase in a country’s level of civil society strength. More concretely, Bunce and Wolchik (2011) explain that US democracy assistance in particular had an effect “at the margins” during the Color Revolutions in Eurasia because it flowed to civil society organizations (24).<sup>2</sup> In addition, case studies of women’s groups in Latin American and the United States (Markowitz and Tice, 2002) and in Russia Henderson (2003), and of civil society organizations in Albania (Quadir and Orgocka, 2014) show that capacity building can work, as organizations that received aid were able to hold more events, were able to expand their message to a certain extent, and become generally more active.

Foreign aid channeled to or through civil society has, however, altered and impacted recipient civil societies in unexpected, deleterious ways. As early as the late 1990s, some

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<sup>1</sup>Given this fact, it is especially important to see how attitudes toward civil society affect engagement with it.

<sup>2</sup>EU democracy assistance, which was channeled mainly to governments, was not as influential.

Western organizations involved in development came to realize that decisions of donors involving funding mechanisms had the potential to “strongly influence[], if not distort, the shape and form of civil society” (INTRAC, 1998, 4). Scholarly work in this area supported this assessment, highlighting that donors were, to some extent, undermining their own efforts due to the unintended consequences of their actions on civil society organizations in target countries. (Howell and Pearce, 2001, 119) point out that “organizations created from the outside often lack a distinct social constituency of support and therefore any social or political meaning for local communities.” The edited volume by Mendelson and Glenn (2002) comes to the same conclusion: work by donors often “isolat[ed] NGOs from their communities” (23).<sup>3</sup> Civil society supported by donors comes across as ‘engineered’ rather than genuine (Ishkanian, 2014).

This strand of the literature also underscores that network building did not necessarily have the desired effect, with civil society organizations that receive aid drawing closer together, but growing to be at odds with those organizations that did not (Hahn-Fuhr and Worschech, 2014; Henderson, 2003; Aksartova, 2009). Henderson (2003) finds, in her study of women’s groups in Russia, that while organizations that received Western support established strong links with other organizations that received outside funding, in doing so they isolated themselves from organizations that did not receive outside funding. In effect, they came to create a league of their own that interacted heavily amongst themselves and with donor organizations, but that were not as connected to the rest of society.<sup>4</sup> With respect to professionalization, Bush (2015) finds that organizations—specifically associated with democracy assistance—that receive Western funding have indeed become more professional and Western overtime, but argues that this has made them less effective, as they pursue tamer projects. Chaplowe and Engo-Tjéga (2007) also find this in the context of African development CSOs. In addition, as Henderson (2003) points out, this professional

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<sup>3</sup>Although see Fagan (2011) and Nitsova, Pop-Eleches and Robertson (July 2018), who argue that civil society organizations do not need a strong social base in order to have a positive effect on political and economic policy-making within a country.

<sup>4</sup>See also Hemmen (N.d.), who makes a very similar point.

character can put them at odds with organizations that have not changed in such ways.

Donors' understanding of civil society, with which they rationalize the civil society development model, has also had a negative effect on civil society development (Mercer, 2002). The types of organizations with which donors have sought to work—and, if they have not been found, they sought to create—has impacted civil society just as much as the diverse support mechanisms. (Baker, 2004, 64) points out that donors generally ascribe to the “liberal-democratic” interpretation of civil society, which favors explicitly political organizations over more general associations and sees civil society as a undeniable positive force within society (Howell and Pearce, 2001). As such, donors have imposed a certain model of civil society on developing countries—a model that may not fit the actual needs and goals of the inhabitants of these countries, and that leads to certain voices not being heard (Porter, 2003; Challand, 2005; Bardhan and Wood, 2015; Robinson and Friedman, 2007). Furthermore, research consistently shows that civil society can be anti-democratic (Armony, 2004), that it can coexist and work to support authoritarian regimes (Lorch and Bunk, 2017; Cheskin and March, 2015; Teets, 2014; Spires, 2011; Ziegler, 2010; Dimitrovova, 2010; Wiktorowicz, 2000), and that it can take on state functions and thereby actually weaken the need for state effectiveness (Bodea and Lebas, 2014; DiLorenzo, 2018; Rahman, 2006; Cleary, 2016).

## 2.2 Participatory Development

Participatory development is a form of development pursued by some donors in response to criticisms that traditional development practices were too top-down in nature and did not consider the needs or demands of communities. Participatory development includes decentralization initiatives – “efforts to strengthen village and municipal governments on both the demand and supply sides” – and community development or community-driven development programs – “efforts to expand community engagement in service delivery” (Mansuri and Rao, 2013, 1). Participatory development as such cannot be directly considered civil society aid;

however, both decentralization and community-driven development target increasing civic engagement and seek to empower individuals to hold governments accountable and push for more effective service delivery. Studies of participatory development have therefore investigated how this can impact civil society — with the caveat that the working understanding of civil society in this policy realm is based more on civil society as characterized by social trust, social cohesion, and collective action (Mansuri and Rao, 2013; Fearon, Humphreys and Weinstein, 2015). In part, this is a step forward: even when populated by organizations, civil society is really the realm of individuals (Malena and Heinrich, 2007). After all, civil society-led political developments are often taken as showing the strength of “people power” (Karatnycky and Ackerman, 2005). Civil society is not made up of only organizations. At the same time, this perspective misses the important role that both formal and informal organizations can play as interlocutors between individuals and governments and other organizations. Studies of civil society in the context of participatory development often see cooperation, social trust, and social cohesion as their main outcome measures (Fearon, Humphreys and Weinstein, 2015). In this sense, the results have been largely inconclusive (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). Yet, the absence of organizations, and the way in which individuals seek to interact with them, in work on community-based development is a missed opportunity and presents questions that still need to be answered.

The attitudes of individuals toward organizations are still largely missing from both discussions. The little work that has been done so far has far-reaching implications that should be extended: Smith (2010), interviewing NGO workers in Nigeria, learned that while the NGO sector in the country has become highly corrupt and captured by elites, with most aid programs showing a lack of results, the development rhetoric around the empowering potential of civil society seemed to shape what NGO workers thought should be possible. This speaks to the power of the rhetoric around foreign aid in recipient countries and underlines how unexplored individual attitudes are in this regard. What draws individuals into the civil society arena in countries that receive foreign aid? And more importantly, what draws them

toward or away from certain organizations?

### 3 Foreign Aid and Individual Attitudes

Recent work on the attitudes of the citizens of foreign aid recipients muddles the picture established in the previous section. Whereas studies of the organizations involved with development discovered that these organizations were foreign and disconnected from their societies, a burgeoning literature on government legitimacy has found out that individuals seem to view foreign-funded aid projects more favorably.

A hypothesized negative consequence of foreign aid has long been that citizens of foreign-aid dependent countries will come to see their governments as illegitimate, weak, and ineffective because the very fact of foreign aid dependence underlines the inability of their states to deliver on the supposed contract between them and these states. Research into the impact of foreign aid on sentiments toward governments has shown, however, that this fear may be unfounded (Dietrich and Winters, 2015). It does not seem that citizens penalize their states for depending on foreign aid—and in fact, may punish them for not bringing in *enough* foreign aid (Dolan, 2018). Critically, these studies have found that aid recipients more positively evaluate aid programs that are identified as being funded via external sources, considering them as being of higher quality than government programs (Winters, Dietrich and Mahmud, 2017; Milner, Nielson and Findley, 2015). These findings are supported by further survey evidence that citizens of foreign aid recipient countries prefer foreign donors to be involved in development projects (Doces and Meyer, 2016).

Although the foreign aid literature on government legitimacy has taken a closer look at how individuals perceive foreign aid and their governments, the opinions of individuals of the organizations involved in foreign aid—and those that are not—nevertheless remain mostly unexplored. Very recent work has begun to examine these attitudes, although it still suffers from important limitations. Montinola and Taylor (2018) use an informational experiment in a survey of Filipino university students to assess whether civic engagement—measured via series of questions that ask about willingness to join a demonstration or donate to a

campaign, among others—is affected by information that money for a particular project came through the Philippine government or through Philippine NGOs, with an additional layer specifying that this money came via foreign aid. They find that activity by NGOs does not impact civic engagement. A drawback of their study is that respondents are not individuals who will benefit from foreign aid—being relatively affluent students. In addition, the study does not directly get at engagement with organizations—in some ways, their result is not a surprise given that development has struggled to increase civic engagement at the individual level (Mansuri and Rao, 2013; Fearon, Humphreys and Weinstein, 2015).

The other study, by Baldwin and Winters (2018), looks at how attitudes and behaviors are changed when individuals are told that foreign aid is being funneled through a non-governmental organization (which they term bypass aid—see Dietrich (2013)). Contrary to many of the studies above, they find that information that an aid project is bypass aid “leads to worse assessments of local government,” although citizens’ willingness to interact with the state is not affected (21). They also find that revealing that an aid project does not have government involvement increases individual’s “willingness to make donations to the project” (22). Once again, however, attitudes toward organizations are only indirectly assessed and civil society is still largely absent. This work only partially helps us answer why and when individuals may be willing to engage with certain organizations, and what effect receiving foreign aid that is channeled through organizations has on overall perceptions of their role vis a vis organizations within society.

## **4 The Impact of Foreign Aid on Civil Society: Theorizing Changes in Attitudes and Engagement**

It is not inconceivable that the changes wrought on civil society by the action of donors have also impacted how individuals relate the civil society space. Implicit in studies summarized above is the sense that outside-supported organizations cannot connect to the societies

in which they should ideally be embedded.<sup>5</sup> Yet, what if the problem extends in both directions, and individuals also cannot connect to the organizations that should ideally help funnel their interests? If civil society is made up of organizations that do not have a connection to the members of that society, those members would understandably be less inclined to engage with such organizations. Furthermore, this might spill over to all types of organizations—in other words, experience with outside funded civil society groups may color individual’s interactions or desire for interaction with other groups. In this section, I develop a theory that relates to how individuals perceive organizations within civil society as a function of their foreignness.

#### 4.1 Attitudes toward Civil Society Organizations: Foreignness

As Alinsky (1989[1971]) indicated in *Rules for Radicals*, individuals should be more open to engagement with organizations that reflect them and their interests. Mendelson and Glenn (2002, 241) restate this intuition in the context of development, when they advocate for further research: “[i]f new ideas and practices are presented in a way that directly competes with local organizational cultures, local people are likely to reject them.” The necessity for respecting local customs when it comes to development organizations is also echoed in the works of Porter (2003); Challand (2005); Bardhan and Wood (2015). Synthesizing these insights with the fact that qualitative studies of foreign founded organizations are disconnected from their societies leads to the reasonable hypothesis that organizations that are “different” in some way will be viewed less favorably than organizations that represent less “different” organizations.

In the realm of development this “difference” could reasonably be termed “foreignness,” in the sense that the dynamics inherent in them do not reflect local norms, needs, or ways of acting collectively. Of course, the average individual will not know the intricacies of how organizations work, nor will they be motivated enough to find this information. Instead,

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<sup>5</sup>Or they are forced to grow and adapt in such a way that they lose the ability to connect to the societies in which they *should* be embedded.

individuals will have to rely on informational cues that signal the ‘foreignness’ of an organization. These signals can take different forms, as there are diverse ways in which an organization may seem foreign. For example, to the extent that the funding for activities in the individual’s locality is known by respondents (in a general sense), if this funding comes from outside of the individual’s country, the organization will be seen as more foreign. Where an organization was founded will serve as another signal of “foreignness,” as organizations formed in far away countries cannot be expected to take on the form of local organizations. Another signal of a slightly different kind of foreignness has to do with the leadership of the organization. Individuals will be less likely to think an organization is “foreign” to them if the leadership is made up of people who reflect them. It is then possible that the organizations that are founded or significantly supported from the outside are too “foreign.” Therefore, it may be reasonable to assume that individuals in foreign aid recipient countries would have negative opinions of such organizations.

The literatures on government legitimacy and participatory development together show, however, that attitudes toward organizations may not be so simple. After all, aid recipients rate foreign aid projects as preferable to government programs and of higher quality. This is understandable if individuals believe that foreign funded projects have access to more resources, more connections, and are more likely to be run more effectively. Translating these findings into the realm of organizations, it might be that citizens view organizations that are more foreign as being more effective and less likely to face operating problems or to be involved in scandals. At the same time, citizens evaluate their governments positively if they receive foreign aid—but foreign aid itself does not seem to work at driving engagement. It is thus possible that while evaluations of the success or power of organizations is positively affected by an organization’s “foreignness,” this “foreignness” may decrease an individual’s willingness to interact with the organization. This does not necessarily mean that individuals will not want to receive less aid from more organizations, simply that they will not seek to participate actively with the organization’s programs. They may still be passive recipients—

this is especially true if they view this organization as more effective.

To put it more clearly, *all else equal, I expect that the more foreign an organization, the more likely an individual in a foreign aid recipient country will be to assess the organization as being successful, effectively run, and better able at providing services. At the same time, however, I expect that the more foreign an organization, the less likely an individual will be to express a desire to interact with that organization actively.*

It is possible, if an organization is perceived as foreign along different dimensions, that each dimension contributes additively to the probability that an individual will want to engage with that organization or the probability that they will evaluate it more highly, independent of the other dimensions. It is also possible, however, that these dimensions may send interactive signals as well: an organization that is characterized by more foreign traits will be seen as more foreign than could be expected by each trait individually. Therefore, *I expect that an organization that is foreign along multiple dimensions will seem particularly foreign to individuals, and that therefore the interaction between different organization characteristics will sharpen the effects described above.*

The hypothesized relationship may not be the same for all individuals. In particular, *individuals who are already in community organizations will be less likely to want to participate in more foreign organizations, and their evaluations of foreign organizations will be lower.* This for two reasons: first, they have already sought to join organizations of their peers, which may mean that they are more drawn to these organizations in the first place, and second, they are exposed their peers in an organizational setting. On the other hand, individuals who are apathetic about joining groups — proxied by not participating in a community organization — will not see effects that are as strong, as they may in general be not as interested in participating in groups. In addition, *individuals who demonstrate apathy about their own role in achieving desirable outcomes because of the work that other, non-local organizations do on their behalf will as a whole be more ambivalent about engagement with organizations.* This is because they may not see the value about joining organizations in

the first place. At the same time, because they believe that other organizations can improve their lives for them, *they will be more likely to see more foreign organizations as being of higher quality.*

The theory on the “foreignness” of organizations is linked here to aid organizations, but it does not directly rely on an individual being exposed to foreign aid aimed at civil society; it instead revolves more generally around how individuals in developing countries will perceive more “foreign” organizations. Therefore, the scope is limited to countries that have seen significant foreign involvement in their civil societies. This is a theory of how foreign aid indirectly may impact citizen-civil society relationships. Nevertheless, this theory has by itself important implications for the state of civil society in developing countries, where there is often a very high level of foreign involvement in civil society—partially, of course, because Western donors have acted to grow civil society in these contexts. In these contexts, this theory may bode ill for democratic and economic development.

## 5 Study Design

To test both how the “foreignness” of civil society organizations, I developed a choice-based conjoint survey experiment that was embedded in the post-implementation survey for the impact evaluation of a large-scale foreign aid project in Malawi.

In this section, I first discuss the structure of the overarching project, including an explanation of how the experiment facilitates testing of the theory developed in this paper, as well as a discussion of the limitations of the sample. I then discuss the conjoint experiment and potential mediating variables.

## 5.1 LGAP Activity

The conjoint experiment and accompanying questions are embedded in the endline<sup>6</sup> survey of the Tax Decentralization Project (TAD) impact evaluation, which studies the effectiveness of a portion of the interventions associated with the Local Government Accountability and Performance (LGAP) activity, a large-scale, five-year, USAID-funded project that aims ‘to improve local government performance and transparency, increase citizen engagement, and strengthen the enabling environment for decentralization in Malawi’.<sup>7</sup> Roll out began in 2016 in 8 districts<sup>8</sup> in the center and south of Malawi.<sup>9</sup> The TAD project uses a  $2 \times 2$  factorial RCT design to see whether tax compliance in Malawian markets can be increased via two treatment arms, each of which consists of a series of components. The first treatment arm, the top-down approach, seeks to make it easier for local governments to handle the market taxes and to provide incentives for tax collectors to decrease corruption and increase efficiency. The second treatment arm consists of bottom-up interventions that seek to provide information to vendors, kickstart service delivery in the markets, and to facilitate the work and training of market committees, which serve as the primary interface between vendors and the local government. This set of interventions aims to increase tax morale among vendors by giving them the tools to push for better accountability and by showing that payment of taxes can bring them material benefits.

The project was carried out in 128 markets in 8 districts between October 2017 and March 2019. Although the number of markets in each district is not uniform,<sup>10</sup> all four treatment groups—control, bottom-up, top-down, bottom-up + top-down—within districts

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<sup>6</sup>This is the after-treatment survey. There was a baseline—before treatment—survey carried out in July to September 2017. This baseline–endline survey format was designed to facilitate difference in difference estimates for the effectiveness of overall project, which is what the impact evaluation seeks to assess. The conjoint was only included in the endline survey, which means that all analysis will be cross-sectional. See (Martin and Zimmerman, n.d.)

<sup>7</sup>The activity is being implemented by Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI) — <https://www.dai.com/our-work/projects/malawi-local-government-accountability-and-performance-lgap>.

<sup>8</sup>These are: Balaka, Blantyre, Kasungu, Lilongwe, M’mbelwa, Machinga, Mulanje, and Zomba.

<sup>9</sup>DAI was recently given the go-ahead to expand operations to a further 16 districts.

<sup>10</sup>This tracks district geographic and population sizes. 24 markets were selected in Kasungu, and M’mbelwa districts, 20 in Mulanje, 16 in Zomba and Lilongwe, 12 in Balaka, and 8 in Machinga and Blantyre.

contained the same number of markets, for a total of 32 markets in each treatment group. Control markets did not receive any treatments. The conjoint experiment is included in the endline survey for this impact evaluation project.

### 5.1.1 Sample

Because the target of the intervention are market vendors, the survey was carried out only among market vendors. The survey used in this study is therefore not a nationally-representative sample of Malawian citizens. Market vendors in Malawi are, on average, wealthier than other Malawian citizens. However, there is a wide range of incomes represented among market vendors, and market vendors can take on influential social positions. It is also important to note that markets were not selected randomly for the study, which means that this sample cannot be taken as a fully representative sample of market vendors in these 8 districts. Larger markets (defined as having more than 100 vendors during the largest market day of the week) were initially chosen for the project, although some small markets were included by necessity when drawing up treatment groups to have balanced groups within districts.

### 5.1.2 TAD Project Survey Design

The survey was conducted in October, November, and December 2018. The survey was conducted by Innovations for Poverty Action.<sup>11</sup> 20 vendors in each market selected by a modified random walk were asked to complete an extensive survey that included a series of tax compliance measures, tax morale assessments, political and social questions, a series of behavioral experiments, and the conjoint experiment, all of which lasted between 45 and 60

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<sup>11</sup><https://www.poverty-action.org/>

minutes.<sup>12</sup> This resulted in a total of 2560 respondents.<sup>13</sup> Respondents completed the conjoint experiment last. Respondents completing this long version of the survey received either 300 or 600 MWK (about \$0.40 or \$0.80)<sup>14</sup> as a token of appreciation for their participation.<sup>15</sup> The survey was administrated in a variety of local languages (Chichewa, Chitumbuka, and Chiyao). Enumerators entered information into tablets.

## 5.2 Variables of Interest

### 5.2.1 Conjoint Design

In a choice-based conjoint experiment, respondents are shown a pair of profiles. These profiles are randomly constructed from a set list of attributes, each with a certain number of levels. Respondents are then asked to choose in some way between the profiles. Because these profiles are randomly constructed, the importance of individual levels within attributes can be determined relatively simply<sup>16</sup>.

In the context of the foreignness of civil society organizations, it makes sense to use the conjoint approach. The alternative would be to use vignettes, but the number of vignette needed to represent the combinations of interest would lead to minuscule treatment groups (there are 240 possible unique civil society organizations possible with the attributes and levels specified). The design used here allows us to see whether respondents perceive organizations founded in Africa, but not in Malawi, differently from organizations founded abroad, while also allowing us to investigate the affect of the other attributes of interest.

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<sup>12</sup>100 vendors total were interviewed at each market after being selected by an adaptive random walk procedure (adaptive because the markets differ greatly in size). 80 of these respondents were asked a shortened form of the survey that only asked questions relevant to the overarching impact evaluation, not to this study, taking approximately 15 minutes. A pre-determined skip pattern was used to ensure that exactly 80 respondents would be asked this short version. The other vendors were asked a longer version of the survey that lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

<sup>13</sup>The final sample size may be slightly smaller. The data were not available at the time this pre-analysis plan was completed.

<sup>14</sup>There was a delayed gratification experiment embedded in the long version of the survey. Respondents could either receive 300 MWK of airtime immediately, or 600 MWK in a week.

<sup>15</sup>The total depended on a delayed gratification experiment also included in the survey.

<sup>16</sup>See Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2012) for an introduction to conjoint survey analyses and their use in political science.

Because of length limitations, respondents were shown only two pairs of profiles. However, due to the size of the sample—2,560—this still means that respondents saw a total of 5,120 pairs of profiles, and so the power for this study should still be adequate.

Before each pair of civil society organizations, respondents were told the following: *Imagine that there are two nongovernmental organization working in your area that are looking to promote free and fair elections in Malawi in 2019. Both organizations have a budget of 1,000,000 kwacha.*<sup>17</sup> *Both organizations are working with the local chief.* The civil society organizations were identified as being nongovernmental in nature and as being active in election monitoring. This is because it is unlikely that respondents would understand either the term civil society organization or nongovernmental organization without a more specific example of what these organizations are trying to accomplish. Although citizen attitudes toward civil society organizations that work in different sectors (health, politics, economics) is a substantively interesting topic to which it would be important to return, limitations of the survey implementation tool made it necessary to keep the number of attributes low. Elections are highly salient in Malawi at this time because campaigning for the May 2019 presidential elections has begun to pick up. The budget for each organization was fixed to avoid respondents making the assumption that organizations founded or funded from abroad would have more resources. Finally, it was specified that both organizations are working with the local chief because local tribal politics are very important in Malawi, especially in more rural areas, and respondents may have assumed tribal support based on certain attribute levels.

Table 1 shows attributes and their respective levels for the conjoint survey experiment. The four attributes tap into distinct aspects of foreignness. The “founded” attribute captures the origin of an organization, with the assumption that organizations founded farther away

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<sup>17</sup>Approximately \$1370. This is a significant amount of money for Malawi, where the GDP per capita was \$486 in 2017 (Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD?locations=MW>). At baseline, the average monthly income for vendors in the sample was approximately MWK 75,000 (about \$100). Discussions with the survey lead for the implementing organization confirmed that this was a significant budget for an organization in Malawi.

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Levels:</b>
Founded in:	Capital of Western Donor, Capital of South Africa, Lilongwe, Your District Capital
Leader used to be a:	Market vendor, Carpenter, Laborer, Business owner, Government bureaucrat, Politician
Funding for work in your district comes from:	Western Donor government, Chinese government, South African government, Malawian government, Contributions from Malawian citizens
Political affiliation:	Independent of any political party, Connected to a political party

Table 1: Attributes and Levels for Conjoint Survey Experiment

from the respondent will be more foreign to the respondent. The levels in this attribute make reference to “capital” in order to maintain their comparability; Lilongwe is the capital of Lilongwe. No city or country name is specified for the the Western donor in order to prevent attitudes toward a particular country affecting the outcome of the experiment and to therefore get a more general perception of foreignness. The “leader” attribute captures a more social dimension of foreignness. Organizations whose leader’s former occupation matches the social standing of the respondents more closely will be less foreign. The levels of each attribute are arranged generally from more foreign to less foreign. In some cases, there are levels of more or less equivalent foreignness, but in different directions. This is for example the case for the funding origin attribute, where both the “Western Donor government” and “Chinese government” represent funding from governments that are not African, and the “leader” attribute, where “laborer” and “carpenter” represent occupations that are different from that of vendor but are of slightly lower social standing and somewhat more comparable social standing, respectively.

All combinations of these attributes were equally likely. Eliminating certain combinations can lead to biased effect estimates, and the estimator used relies on the random assignment of attributes with non-zero probability (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2012, 18). Although it would be possible to assign some combinations a negligible, near-zero probability, there is no theoretic reason to believe that certain combinations here would be completely

unrealistic. While it may be somewhat unlikely for a current market vendor, laborer, or carpenter to be the leader of an organization founded in the capital of a Western donor, focusing on the *former* profession of the leader of the hypothetical organization circumvents this problem.

The two profiles were presented to respondents side by side. Although in low-literacy environments conjoints are often accompanied by pictures designed to represent the various levels, this was deemed impractical because of the abstract nature of some of the attributes. Instead, enumerators presented the conjoint attributes and levels as a type of quasi-vignette, where they described each organization in turn, making sure that the respondent was clear on the attributes of each organization.

### **Primary Outcome Variables**

After each pair of civil society organizations, respondents were asked two forced-choice questions. First, they were asked *If each organization were to hold a meeting in your village, which would you be more likely to attend?* This question gets at the issue of engagement. Second, they were asked *Regardless of whether you would attend a meeting or not, which organization do you think would be most likely to be involved with a domestic scandal?* This question focuses on a more general evaluation of these organizations and does not require respondents to signal any desire for engagement.<sup>18</sup> The question asks about a *domestic* scandal because of the possibility that respondents could assume that scandals would be in the country of origin of the aid donor, in which case respondents would be led to choose foreign organizations over local ones when funding was also foreign, or choosing local organizations with foreign funding over local organizations with local funding. In Chichewa, Chitumbuka, and Chiyao, the languages in which the survey was fielded, there is no direct translation for the word domestic, and so this part of the question was translated as "in Malawi," which makes the interpretation much clearer. In addition, the type of scandal is not specified be-

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<sup>18</sup>This second question initially asked which organization respondents thought would be more successful at ensuring free and fair elections, but focus group discussions during piloting made it apparent that respondents had difficulty determining what success meant and separating this question from the previous question.

cause the purpose of the question is to get at underlying beliefs about the competency and trustworthiness of the organization, not about a particular aspect of the job performed by this organization.<sup>19</sup> Piloting of this question did not seem to indicate problems with this question.<sup>20</sup> This question was asked second in order to not contaminate the first answer—after all, the expectation is to see different results for these two questions. The intro to this second question “*Regardless of whether you would attend a meeting or not*” was added in order to further separate the two questions by priming respondents to exclude the previous answer during the response formation process (Schwarz, Strack and Mai, 1991).

### 5.2.2 Subgroup Questions

I will use two questions included in the survey to assess apathy. Both revolve around involvement with organizations.

1. *Are you a member of a community organization? (Yes/No)*
2. *When nongovernmental organizations work on our behalf, we need to do less work ourselves to get the government to listen to us. (Strongly Agree/Somewhat Agree/Somewhat Disagree/Strongly Disagree)*

Question 1 just checks whether individuals are involved in a community organization or not. Individuals who respond *No* are presumably not as interested at participating in organizations. Question 2 assesses a different version of apathy. Individuals who respond *Strongly Agree* or *Somewhat Agree* to this question signal that they believe that they do not need to engage with civil society organizations in order to still get desirable outcomes.

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<sup>19</sup>At the same time, there have been a few high profile corruption scandals in Malawi in the past years, including the infamous Cashgate scandal that was uncovered in 2013. This scandal involved embezzlement of government funds.

<sup>20</sup>I worked closely with the translation team in order to ensure that the meaning of the question was conveyed more than the direct text of the question. Translation was checked via back-translation for all questions in the survey.

## 6 Proposed Empirical Approach

In this section I lay out my data analysis strategy. At the end, I also formalize my hypotheses with respect to the specifics of the models I will fit.

### 6.1 Proposed Conjoint Analysis

I propose two different ways of analyzing the conjoint experiment, one based on the work of Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2012), and one based on the work of Egami and Imai (2018). In the conjoint experiment explained above, there are two main outcomes of interest: whether a respondent would be willing to attend a meeting held by the organization and whether the respondent believes the organization would be involved with a domestic scandal.

### 6.2 Standard Conjoint Approach Without Interaction Effects

In the standard conjoint analysis, we can treat the responses to both questions as binary outcomes, with each organization in each pair being either selected or not due to the forced choice nature of the conjoint experiment (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2012). Due to the random creation of profiles, estimates for the average marginal component-specific effect (AMCE) of each attribute-level on the probability that a respondent will choose either CSO A or CSO B can be obtained by regressing a series of dummies that represent the attribute-levels on the binary outcome for each organization. Note that this necessitates a base category, and so the AMCE will be relative to that category. In each case, the unit of analysis is a civil society organization within a profile pair. This means that there will be four observations per respondent. This results in the following model:

$$Y_{ijk} = \alpha + \beta * \mathbf{X}_{ijk} + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

where  $i$  indexes individuals,  $j$  indexes profile pair 1 or 2, and  $k$  indexes organization within a pair (also 1 or 2).  $Y_{ijk}$  is either 1 or 0 to indicate *attend* or *not attend* and *scandal* or *no scandal*.  $\mathbf{X}_{ijk}$  represents the vector of dummies that indicate which levels are active for organization  $ijk$ , and  $\beta$  represents the vector of AMCEs for each attribute relative to base category. Because there are four observations per individual, I will cluster standard errors by individual. As a robustness check, I will run the model with enumerator and market fixed effects. Note that this model can be estimated either as an OLS model or as a logit or probit model; I will estimate the model as a logit model and will use OLS estimation as a robustness check.

### 6.3 Causal ANOVA Conjoint Approach With Interaction Effects

Respondents are choosing between different profiles made up of a series of attributes. In this setting, interactions are a distinct possibility, if not nearly guaranteed. Individuals may make their decisions based on a particular grouping of certain attribute levels, rather than just on singular level, which is what the linear additive model in Section 6.2 implies. In the context of the foreignness of organizations, it stands to reason that different aspects of foreignness work together: an organization founded in respondent's district capital, whose former leader used to be a market vendor, and which receives funds from Malawian citizens will be less foreign to a market vendor than an organization that was founded in the US capital, whose leader is a former politician, and that receives funding for its work from Western donors.

Nevertheless, the standard conjoint analytical framework does not deal well with interaction effects between various factors. Scholars generally add interactions into the regression model explained in Section 6.2 based on theoretical expectations and estimate an average interactive effect (AIE). As (Egami and Imai, 2018, 1) point out, however, this approach suffers from two limitations. First, the AIE is also relative to the baseline and therefore its size will depend on the base level chosen, which can be problematic if the attribute does not have a baseline category. Second, and more important, is the fact that with a larger number

of levels and attributes, the number of interactions increases quickly. In the current design, there would be 239 main and interaction effects with interactions between all four attributes. The sheer number of parameters increases the chance that effects could be found where none exist. In addition, it would be arduous to interpret so many coefficient estimates. As such, regularization would be required. However, “the lack of invariance property means that the results of standard regularized estimation will depend on the choice of baseline conditions” (Egami and Imai, 2018).

In order to overcome these challenges and assess the interaction effects between the levels of the attributes in Table 1, I will use a different version of the average interaction effect developed by Egami and Imai (2018), which they term the average marginal interaction effect (AMIE). The AMIE is defined for all interactions and is invariant to a base category. I will employ the ANOVA-based estimator for the AMIEs developed by Egami and Imai (2018). The method proposed by them allows for levels of categorical and ordered variables to be collapsed and includes regularization in order to limit the number of predictors. This helps eliminate the possibility of false positives, given the large number of predictors. In effect, this allows the data to produce the types of interaction that are actually significantly associated with the outcome.

## 6.4 Analysis of Main Outcomes

I aim first to compare the AMCEs and AMEs between the two choice questions. This will help disentangle attitudes from engagement. In the context of attributes and given my theory, I expect that ACME for Question 1 will be lower for levels that represent more foreign organizations. On the other hand, I expect that the estimates for the AMCEs for the second question will be higher for organizations that are more foreign.

## 6.5 Subgroup Analysis

In accordance with the discussion of possible causal heterogeneity in Section 4.1, I will test whether individuals who are more apathetic toward group participation in general behave differently. As such, I will repeat the above analyses for those who answer *Strongly Agree*, *Somewhat Agree*, *Somewhat Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* or *Yes* and *No* to the questions listed in Section 5.2.2, which get at two different aspects of apathy.<sup>21</sup>

## 7 Conclusions and Extensions

It is possible that state and development contexts can impact how individuals relate to foreign aid-supported civil society. For example, it is possible that regimes that are more dependent on aid and are more dependent on the West, like Malawi, cannot problematize the foreignness of organizations or play up the salience of this characteristic like some countries in Eastern Europe can. In addition, it is possible that in weak state contexts, citizens prefer outside organizations because they are seen as unaligned with the political forces within the country. Thus, a natural extension of this work will be to repeat this analysis in a series of countries. It will be especially interesting to replicate this study in Eastern Europe, where many of the motivations for theory underpinning this work were identified. In addition, it remains to be seen to what extent foreign aid funneled through civil society organizations or aimed at increasing civic engagement may change attitudes toward civil society organizations and thus shape civil societies more actively.

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<sup>21</sup>I will also dichotomize the *Agree/Disagree* question responses. If only a small number of respondents fall into one of the four response categories, the statistical analyses will not have enough power to detect an effect or will run into the  $p > n$  problem.

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