# *Preface*

The world today has many pressing problems and ample areas of acute need. International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) are one of the main channels through which individuals engage in collective action to address issues beyond their own country's borders. INGOs are organizations with a significant collective footprint, reporting tens of billions of dollars in revenue and channeling a substantial percentage of overseas development assistance in recent years. INGOs must thus simultaneously advance their goals of social change and manage the realities of operating as organizations. The tensions that arise from these twin pursuits permeate this book.

In conducting our research, we were privileged to speak with many INGO practitioners. The need to balance bold goals and pragmatic organizational realities is a constant struggle for those working in this sector. In our conversations, we found it notable how open and self-critical INGO staff tend to be, often speaking quite frankly about some of the biggest challenges in their work. We were routinely impressed by their desire to engage in self-evaluation and greatly appreciate them sharing their insights. Our first debt is to all those respondents who participated in this project's interviews, focus groups, and survey. We hope that this book adequately reflects their voices and the strategic issues that they encounter in their work.

Our motivation for writing this book stems from two sources. Prior to starting this project, both of us had studied the politics of INGOs in different issue areas. In previous work, Hadden documented the massive influx in civil society actors working on climate change issues at the time of the 2009 Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change. This research drew her attention to a paradox: While scholars would intuitively expect more INGOs to be associated with better advocacy outcomes, the reality was much more mixed, with long-sought population growth bringing attendant problems of communication and



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coordination. At the conclusion of that project, she wondered whether similar dynamics might apply to other cases and in other issue areas.

Bush has been intrigued by the challenges faced by nonprofit organizations since her time coleading a small INGO during the year before graduate school (and then later serving on its board). After experiencing the challenges of securing funding for an INGO firsthand, she conducted research on how competition among INGOs engaged in democracy assistance encouraged those groups to adopt a more technical and less confrontational approach to promoting democracy overseas. After finishing this project, she wondered how competition might be affecting INGOs that are active in other issue areas.

The initial seed for a joint project was planted at a workshop on Organizational Ecology and International Relations held at Princeton University in 2014. Although Kenneth W. Abbott, Jessica F. Green, and Robert O. Keohane organized the workshop to discuss their important research using organizational ecology to study slowing growth in formal intergovernmental organizations, we quickly became convinced of organizational ecology's great value as a framework to explore trends in INGO politics, as well. We thank the organizers and participants in this workshop for the stimulating discussion that gave birth to this idea and our friendship.

Aspects of this project have been presented at numerous conferences and workshops, including the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association and International Studies Association and seminars hosted by the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, City University of New York, Georgetown University, and Temple University. We have received insightful feedback from colleagues in all of those settings and many others, which has greatly improved the work. In particular, we'd like to acknowledge the participants in our book workshop – Michael N. Barnett, Jennifer N. Brass, Alexander Cooley, Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Daniel Nielson, and Sarah S. Stroup – who took time out of their busy schedules to read and comment on the entire manuscript. Our work has been greatly enhanced by their generous and incisive feedback.

We also acknowledge the support that we have received from our departmental colleagues at Temple University, the University of Maryland, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University. This group

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includes especially David Cunningham, Virginia Haufler, and Margaret Pearson at University of Maryland; Orfeo Fioretos, Alexandra Guisinger, and Mark Pollack at Temple; Alexandre Debs and Tyler Pratt at Yale; and Julia Gray at University of Pennsylvania. Outside of our home departments, we received thoughtful feedback from Cristina Balboa, Elizabeth Bloodgood, Mark Buntaine, Xun Cao, Jeff Colgan, Stephen Chaudoin, Maryam Zarnegar Deloffre, Jennifer Dixon, Marty Finnemore, Erin Graham, Jessica Green, Tana Johnson, Bob Keohane, Jesse Lecy, Yon Lupu, Elizabeth Nugent, Woody Powell, Aseem Prakash, Lauren Prather, Paloma Raggo, Hans-Peter Schmitz, Kathryn Sikkink, Jonas Tallberg, Sid Tarrow, Joannie Tremblay-Boire, Felicity Vabulas, and Yael Zeira, among many others.

Many research assistants supported the empirical analyses. They included a number of skilled graduate students: Eden Aaron, Trey Billings, Ed Hendrickson, Connor Kopchick, Sloan Lansdale, Melissa Pavlik, Gino Pauselli, Ryan Pike, and Alauna Safarpour. We benefited from undergraduate research assistance, as well, particularly from Chloe Adda, Gabriel Ben-Jakov, MacKenzie Bonner, Michael Fitzpatrick, Caleb Nolan, Nhan Nguyen, Fatih Fain Oman, Sasha Thomas, and Juanita Garcia Uribe.

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We thank our editor at Cambridge University Press, John Haslam, for his support of this project. We also received thoughtful comments from anonymous reviewers. Kelley Friel carefully edited our text. Derek Gottlieb provided us with a skillful index. Some of the

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material in Chapter 3 was previously published in *International Studies Quarterly*. We thank Oxford University Press for granting permission to reproduce it here, and we also acknowledge the editors, reviewers, and colleagues who gave us feedback on that article, which has shaped the book in valuable ways.

Our personal debts are even more significant than our professional ones. During the ten years since we first met, we have both undertaken major career and life transitions, all the while watching world politics change in significant ways. In recent years, our young children Linus, Walter, and Julian have inspired us with their curiosity and motivated us to better understand the potential and pitfalls of efforts to improve the world. We dedicate the book to our spouses – David Cormode and Scott Frick – whose constancy during tumultuous periods of political change and early parenthood has been essential to our ability to complete this work. We are ever grateful for their love and support.

Sarah Bush,
Philadelphia, August, 2024

Jennifer Hadden,
Washington D.C., August, 2024

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