

Research Report

“Adjust, Resist or Disband? The effect of political repression on civil society organizations in Bangladesh and Zambia”

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Research focus: Civic Space under Pressure

Introduction and rationale

Since the end of the Cold War, donor countries channeled large amounts of foreign aid through CSOs, both to build up civil society in poor countries and because of disillusionment with aid-receiving governments. Yet, we currently see increased political repression of CSOs in aid-receiving countries, restricting flows of foreign-sourced funds to locally operating CSOs.

Political repression, understood as legal and extra-legal measures restricting the operations of CSOs, has now been established in 60 of the 153 low-and-middle-income-countries (LMICs), by both authoritarian and formally democratic regimes (1). Measures include foreign funding restrictions, taxation of funds, creating administrative burdens for exchange with foreign CSOs, and restrictive visa policies and opaque registration procedures (2). Initial findings show that these challenges negatively affect CSOs, particularly those with financial and/or political ties to foreign governments and CSOs (3).

Academic and policy literature has only begun to make sense of this trend of shrinking civic space for CSOs (4). In particular, we lack a systematic view on the effect of political repression on CSOs. Moreover, most literature so far focuses on the immediate effect on locally operating CSOs (5), while it is also important to look at the impact on "Northern" CSOs, investigating strategic dilemmas for CSOs inside and outside these countries. Finally, so far, most studies focus on state repression, while it is also possible that Non-State Actors (NSAs) contribute to such repression.

This project examines in more depth the effect of political repression on CSO formation, functioning, and survival. It studies these issues in Bangladesh and Zambia. Both countries are formal democracies, and among the top global receivers in development aid, with considerable amounts channeled through CSOs, but with recent increases in political repression towards CSOs. Few studies thus far have investigated these countries' CSO-sectors, and no study we know of has empirically examined the effects of political repression by state and non-state actors on these CSO-sectors, nor the effect on Northern CSOs active in these countries. From a Dutch policy perspective, these countries are relevant as a working ground for politically active CSOs supported by the Dutch government through the Dialogue & Dissent-Framework developed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

2. Country context

Political repression of civil society in Zambia has been increasing since the mid-2000s. The restrictive 2009 NGO Act increased state control over both international and local civil society organizations (CSOs) through new, burdensome registration requirements and the establishment of a government-led NGO registration board with a high degree of power over approving the work of CSOs and power to enforce harmonization of CSO activities with government development plans. The Act further requires CSOs to comply with cumbersome reporting requirements – including disclosure of funding sources – and to adhere to a government code of conduct. Government officials have wide discretionary powers over CSOs, including over registration approval (6).

Government officials have also increasingly engaged in negative behaviors towards both local and international CSOs, particularly those that are rights-focused, including harassment and interference with organizational operations. This uptick in de facto repression coincides with the rise to power of current President Lungu and his more general crackdown on the political opposition, independent media, and human rights defenders (7). Current President Lungu has increasingly clamped down on basic civil liberties through emergency decrees and increasing police powers of arrest and detention. The U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 reports that the government disrupted and prevented meetings of CSOs (8). Police prevented CSOs from publicly protesting government actions, and government officials have gone so far as to intervene in the operations of prominent local CSOs critical of the government, and to try to shut them down (9). Recent Afrobarometer survey results show that Zambian citizens feel there is increased repression of rights to free expression and association, and that CSOs in particular have much less freedom than they did just a few years ago (10).

Bangladesh has been experiencing increased political repression of civil society since around 2014, when the country experienced a highly disputed and violent national election. Since that point in time, the ruling party has been clamping down on all forms of opposition (including CSOs) in order to maintain power (11). Despite the fact that country is a top global recipient of development aid and is highly dependent on international organizations to assist with the humanitarian response to the ongoing Rohingya refugee crisis, the Government of Bangladesh adopted a law in 2016 that heavily restricts the operations of foreign-funded CSOs. The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Associations) Act prohibits organizations from receiving foreign donations for the purpose of carrying out voluntary activity without government approval, and further requires all organizations that want to receive and use foreign donations to register with the government

and secure advance project approval. Finally, the government can attend CSO meetings, can replace an organization's governing board at any time, and can punish any CSO perceived to be making derogatory comments about the Constitution (12).

Human Rights Watch noted in a 2016 web post that the law is part of a sustained government crackdown against civil society, with a ruling party official stating that CSOs have no right to freedom of expression (13). The U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 reports that the government has prevented several CSOs from meeting, has withheld approval for foreign funding to CSOs working on sensitive issues such as human rights, and has outright banned a number of advocacy organizations from operating in the country (14). CIVICUS's Monitor website, with its live evaluation of civic freedoms, notes that conditions for human rights defenders are deteriorating, with the government systematically clamping down on independent dissent to shore up power. Hundreds of rights activists have been arrested, tortured, and disappeared, while many more have been subject to harassment, intimidation, and arrest (15).

3. Research objectives and Relationship to Dialogue and Dissent's Theory of Change

In line with government's Dialogue & Dissent-framework's Theory of Change (hereafter: D&D-ToC)'s focus on *civic space under pressure*, we are first interested to uncover how political repression on CSOs affects the formation, functioning, and survival of local CSOs operating in Bangladesh and Zambia. We investigate the impact on their strategies, relationship with other organizations (notably European CSOs), and their missions and activities (16). Research results will speak explicitly to two assumptions in the D&D-ToC: that CSOs need civic space to perform political roles, and that support from Northern CSOs and governments can strengthen CSOs in LMICs (17).

Following academic literature (18), we are particularly interested to learn whether the political roles of CSOs in Bangladesh and Zambia, and those of European CSOs supporting civil society in these countries through collaboration, funding or on-the-ground activities, change as a result of such restrictive measures, in particular in terms of CSO activities and issue focus. Similarly, we are interested to learn whether the CSO-sector in these countries at large is changing through adaptive organizational shifts or disbanding. In line with the ToC's focus on variation in *the political role of CSOs*, we are thus interested to uncover whether shrinking civic space affects the nature of CSO political advocacy. In addition to forcing a shift in issue focus, government repression can affect the roles of CSOs in advocacy (educational, communicative, representational or cooperative) (19), impact preference for advocacy strategies (20), and/or affect the organizational form of CSOs (21). Our research also speaks to D&D's focus on *the aid chain*, since we are interested in the evolution of links between Southern CSOs and Northern CSOs and governments (22).

4. Research questions, methodology

4.1 Research questions

The project departed from the following research question: *What is the effect of increased political repression by state and non-state actors on the civil society sector in Bangladesh and Zambia?*

This question was divided into the following specific sub-questions:

1. What describes the repressive activities by state actors on CSOs in Zambia and Bangladesh and the European CSOs they collaborate with?
2. What describes the repressive activities by NON-state actors on CSOs in Zambia and Bangladesh and the European CSOs they collaborate with?
3. What is the effect of political repression on CSOs in Zambia and Bangladesh in terms of their organizational survival, activities, issue focus, and linkage to foreign CSOs?
4. What is the effect of political repression on European CSOs in terms of their activities, issue focus, and linkage to Bangladeshi and Zambian civil society?

4.2 Concepts, operationalization and rethinking the analytical framework

Civil Society Organizations are understood as non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations (23). We distinguished between local CSOs and foreign CSOs based on the place of their head offices, taking into account that local CSOs can be supported by foreign organizations and foreign funding. We defined political repression of CSOs as legal measures (laws and policies) as well as extra-legal governmental and Non State Actor (NSA) actions like threats, intimidation, harassment, and physical violence that restrict the ability of CSOs to form and operate. We measured legal repression as the adoption and implementation of more restrictive CSO laws, using updated data from Dupuy et al (24). We measured extra-legal government repression through the

Varieties of Democracy dataset (25). Focusing on legal and extra-legal repression allows us to understand the many ways in which civil society space is closing in LMICs. In terms of the effect of such repression, we focused on changes in CSO formation, functioning, and survival. We examine CSO disbanding or change in organizational form, growth, and decline (measured in terms of funding and staff), changes in issue focus (observed through study of CSO activities and professed policy priorities of CSO representatives), change in funding sources, and change in CSO attitudes and activities toward government and foreign partners (observed through documented interactions, and professed policy perspectives by CSO representatives and experts).

Our project therefore originally investigated four possible causal chains:

1. Governmental repression → local CSO effects
2. NSA repression → local CSO effects
3. Governmental repression → effects on European CSO collaborations with/activities in B and Z
4. NSA repression → effects on European CSO collaborations with/activities in B and Z

For CSO effects we then identified four possible CSO responses: Bangladeshi, Zambian and European CSOs would either a) adjust to restrictions and change their form, function and focus so as to be compliant with regulations; or b) resist repression, if possible in cooperation with foreign CSOs and governments that critique Bangladeshi and Zambian governments; c) choose more informal, under-the-radar forms of activism; or d) have Bangladeshi and Zambian CSOs more actively seek out local funding and partners and diminish their dependence on foreign funds and partners. This categorization turned out to be viable in distinguishing among CSO responses to repression. It must be said though, that we found fewer cases of b) direct resistance (the Zambian CSO refusal to register with government being an example) and d) finding local funding, than of disbanded and adjusting organizations. Below in the results section we will elaborate on this.

Our findings show, perhaps unsurprisingly, that it is better to conceptualize governmental and NSA repression as very much intertwined, rather than as separate causal chains. NSA repression sometimes do directly and autonomously impacts CSOs, in the sense that CSOs are affected by non-state actor activities to repress that appear to be motivated by that actor's own interests separate from the state. But more often, repression from either governmental or NSA side anticipates another parties interests, with NSAs sometimes repressing out of a concern for state agendas, and governmental actors sometimes repressing out of a concern for a particular NSA agenda.

Next to this, our findings indicate that some of the adjustments CSOs make to their work imply a repressive climate, but are ultimately self-imposed and pre-emptive and are not preceded by actual repressive behavior by a state or nonstate actor targeting the organization. CSOs may for instance stop advocating for an issue because they fear government will clamp down on them given the regime's close ties with a non-state actor, whose interest runs counter to what the CSO originally wanted to advocate.

In sum, our findings would inform a somewhat more complex analytical framework than the one we presented at the start of the research. See for a graphical illustration Appendix I, where state and nonstate actor repressive activities are reciprocally intertwined, and some governmental and NSA activities not so much directly repress organizations, but contribute to a climate where CSOs alter their behavior out of fear of future repression.

4.3 Methodology and methods

Bangladesh and Zambia were selected in line with the NWO-WOTRO Call for Proposal's substantive priorities and demand for a cross-continental comparison. Findings are first presented at country-level. In both countries the backlash against CSOs (and arguably against democracy more broadly) is fairly recent. This similarity means that findings about their CSO-sectors can be compared and synchronicity in the results possibly speaks to audiences interested in CSO-sectors in other LMICs with more recent repressive tendencies. Of course, Bangladesh and Zambia also differ in many ways and a range of different factors could contribute to effects we study. We are therefore cautious to claim that similarities in findings would be broadly generalizable. From an analytical perspective we are encouraged to learn that the Verschuuren project on Ethiopia and the Van Wessel project on India found so many similar patterns of CSO responses, indicating that there is indeed broader relevance to our findings beyond these country cases. (From a political perspective this is of course ground for concern.)

Our qualitative study focused on 28 CSOs in total, and looked into four categories of non-state actors possibly contributing to repression. In Bangladesh, we studied 8 local CSOs in depth, and also analyzed the

influence of garments industry and Islamist groups on CSOs. In Zambia, we studied 8 CSOs in depth and also analyzed the influence of local media, the mining business and church groups. Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix 1 provide an overview of case selection.

At present we know too little about how and the degree to which businesses and their interest groups may contribute to repression of CSOs. This is a pertinent question to investigate, given how businesses are considered as important actors in the furthering of sustainable and inclusive growth in the perception of many development policy-makers. Moreover, business-CSO partnerships are often heralded as instruments for promoting sustainable development (26). But at the same time, businesses and CSOs do not always see eye to eye when it comes to addressing sustainable development (27). Moreover, business-government relations in many LMICs are intimate and there are anecdotal examples of businesses using their influence with political elites to reduce the influence of CSOs (28). It is therefore pertinent to learn more about how businesses relate to politically repressive acts by governments toward civil society, and whether they contribute to repression themselves.

Our selection of other non-state actors (media, church, Islamist groups) was a) inductively based on the first set of conversations with CSO representatives about relevant non-state actors contributing to repression; and b) consciously focuses in Bangladesh on different actors than the Perera/Civicus-led research project, given the undesirability of overlapping cases.

The project first investigated changes in the number and foreign funding of Bangladeshi and Zambian NGOs over the last ten years, using Yearbook of International Organizations, USAID, OECD and government and CSO umbrella information.

Then it analyzed CSOs qualitatively. Across the CSO cases, we chose to vary in terms of financial relation to Dutch government, Dutch CSOs and in particular the Dialogue and Dissent-framework, studying both CSOs with and without such connections. Next to this, our cases varied in organizational issue focus (private-sector engagement, human rights, environment, development, labor and women's rights). The terms "private sector-engagement" refer to CSOs that address businesses and business operations in their advocacy for developmental causes such as sustainable growth and inclusive growth. It includes CSOs that campaign businesses, but also CSOs that partner with businesses in order to further societal and environmental goals.

Important for our purposes is that not all of these CSOs explicitly address the state as a target for advocacy. Private sector advocacy can for instance be more or less rights-oriented in nature, and therefore be more or less politically contentious. Business-CSO interactions could be about union rights or indigenous community rights, but also about ostensibly somewhat less contentious issues such as creating jobs, access to clean water or medicine, and improving infrastructure.

For this reason, we analytically expected that private sector engagement, environmental and development-oriented CSOs have more room for maneuver to substantively adjust than human rights CSOs, should certain advocacy causes or repertoire become more difficult as a consequence of political repression. Following Dupuy et al (29)'s insights from the CSO-sector in Ethiopia, we considered it possible that such room for maneuver matters in how CSOs manage to survive political repression.

Next to our research activities in Bangladesh and Zambia, we also studied 12 European CSOs because of their relevance for the CSO-sector in Bangladesh and Zambia. Again, we choose both CSOs supported by the Dialogue and Dissent-framework, and CSOs without such connections. We select CSOs active in human rights, development, the environment and private sector-engagement.

We studied CSOs through semi-structured in-depth interviews with representatives, publicly available policy documentation, and internal documentation that representatives want to share. We also interviewed experts on government and civil society. Our interest was in developments in the past ten years, focusing most specifically on the time since the occurrence of most salient legal and extra-legal measures targeting CSOs. Qualitative insights for all sub-questions are developed through comparison (based on observations across the CSOs analyzed) and process-tracing (reconstructing decision-making inside CSOs; 30).

5. Results

1. What describes the repressive activities by state actors on CSOs in Zambia and Bangladesh and the European CSOs they collaborate with?

State actors are contributing to the repression of CSOs in both Bangladesh and Zambia. The Government of Bangladesh has implemented regulations monitoring, and often preventing, foreign-funded CSO projects and requiring NGO registration, leaving room for the suspension of registration. CSOs also suffer from extra-legal measures, such as digital and physical surveillance and intimidation by the military and civil security agents. The Government of Bangladesh no longer protects freedom of association or expression, instead arresting people for posting statements online or gathering in public. The Government of Zambia has created, but not effectively implemented, an NGO Act. Many Zambian CSOs have decided not to comply with government registration requirements. The Government of Zambia clamps down on CSOs through threats and persecution using other pieces of colonial legislation, and the courts have sometimes supported repression (particularly when criticized). In both Bangladesh and Zambia, increasing regime control of the media restricts CSO opportunities for voice in the media.

Repressions affect both CSOs connected to and CSOs not connected to the D & D-framework in similar ways in our sample. Labour rights and human rights oriented CSOs in our sample more regularly deal with repression than developmental and environmental oriented CSOs. For environmental CSOs the likelihood of repression appears to be related to their advocacy focus. Some environmental issues are easily aligned with government policy (i.e. a Bangladeshi campaign on the need for international agreement on climate change goals), some not (i.e. a campaign on the polluting effects of an industry championed by government).

2. What describes the repressive activities by non-state actors on CSOs in Zambia and Bangladesh and the European CSOs they collaborate with?

Businesses contribute to repression in Bangladesh and Zambia, both individually and through interest associations. In Bangladesh, businesses actively intimidate local CSOs and union representatives (and sometimes their relatives), so as to prevent them from advocating for labour issues, such as freedom of association and a living wage, and for some environmental causes. Businesses also have observably close ties to the military and police in case of (expected) strikes in order to intimidate and clamp down on workers and environmental activists. As a result, surveillance by security agents for labor activists is almost constant. In Zambia, mining companies seek to undercut the authority of CSOs that promote worker rights by funding parallel industry-friendly CSOs and through public relations (PR).

Islamist movements in Bangladesh advocate against laws promoting women's rights and LGBT rights, and occasionally attack members of the LGBT community. They are mostly successful in reducing space for CSOs to operate because of government's tendency to give in to the demand of these groups and closing policy debates about lifting restrictive laws. They thereby restrict advocacy possibilities for particularly women's rights and LGBT rights CSOs.

Church groups in Zambia do not directly repress CSOs in our sample, but their influence on CSOs is also evident indirectly. Zambian government has created close institutional connections with the Christian faith and its representatives. This has led particularly sexual and reproductive health rights CSOs to self-censor and withdraw from political advocacy deemed inappropriate by the conservative elements within Christian groups, out of fear of losing funding, partnership opportunities for health policies with the church, or being targeted by government.

Some Zambian news media contribute to repression by restricting access of CSOs to news reports. Such restrictions are the result of Zambian government clamping down on news media through legal and extra-legal measures, including financial co-optation of news organizations, and intimidation of journalists. This creates a regime of fear and self-censorship among journalists, some of whom reduce coverage of government criticism. This in particular affects CSOs involved in holding government to account, such as human rights CSOs.

NSA repression affects both CSOs in our sample with a D & D connections, and those without such connections, in a similar manner.

3. What is the effect of political repression on CSOs in Zambia and Bangladesh in terms of their organizational survival, activities, issue focus, and linkage to foreign CSOs?

Various data sources show that the amount of NGOs in Bangladesh and Zambia with international activities and membership remains relatively stable over time, also after the installation of NGO regulatory restrictions. Repression does not seem to affect the amount of internationally oriented nongovernmental non-profit organizations engaged in some public cause that are at work in both countries. Bangladesh remains a country with a very large NGO sector and many activities across different regions, also in times of

NGO restrictions. Zambia's NGO sector is much smaller, also considering its population, but is growing over the past decade. Both countries have seen the amount of foreign funding (including that for CSOs) reduced over the past years, no doubt in large part a consequence of both countries' new status as LMICs. For data see figures and Table 3 in Appendix 1.

Our interviewees hold that many CSOs in Bangladesh and Zambia that engage in political advocacy have disappeared or gone 'off the radar', operating out of the public eye, in response to repression. Various CSOs formerly engaged in advocacy now focus on service delivery, or have shifted from rights-based to needs-based advocacy. CSOs in our sample in both Bangladesh and Zambia have become more cautious in targeting the government when lobbying and in campaigns, but they have not moved away from advocacy in relation to the state altogether. Rather, they prefer: local government-oriented activities over central government activities; implementation and enforcement-oriented engagement with the state, rather than agenda setting-oriented advocacy; using their personal network with government officials to gauge the realm of the possible with various branches; advocacy on topics they have tested and found to be less political than others; and using cloaked policy language that appears apolitical or 'neutral', with a degree of self-censoring. They also engage in other activities as a result of restrictions and repression omitted from this report to protect the respondents.

Generally, CSOs working on environmental and developmental agendas have an easier time to adapt their work to government agendas and continue advocacy. Within their thematic areas of work, there are opportunities for advocacy that are less contentious in the eyes of the government regime. As noted, government ambitions for developmental projects and environmental projects may be in line with what some CSOs advocate for, and ongoing peaceful policy exchange on some dossiers does ensue. Agriculturally oriented projects in Bangladesh may serve as an example. Human rights and worker rights CSOs in our sample usually do not have this room.

In Zambia, Internet and social media are still venues for CSOs exchange and outreach to citizens, given how these media are not yet controlled by government. In Bangladesh, CSOs do not consider social media appropriate for this purpose, given government's capacity for surveillance.

In our sample, CSOs connected to the D & D framework seem to behave in similar ways as a result of repression and restrictions as those not connected to the D & D framework.

4. What is the effect of political repression on European CSOs in terms of their activities, issue focus, and linkage to Bangladeshi and Zambian civil society?

European service-oriented CSOs try to adjust to regulatory restrictions and maintain good relations with the government. Advocacy-oriented European CSOs focused on labour, the environment and human rights generally adjust to their local partners'/offices' demands and revise their work on transnational advocacy in ways omitted from this public report to protect respondents. Next to this they sometimes discontinue or delay practices considered too dangerous for local partners, and shift to advocacy tactics that are more European policy-oriented than Bangladesh and Zambia-oriented.

Generally in our sample, the Western European CSOs connected to the D & D framework seem to behave in similar ways as the Western European CSOs not connected to the D & D framework. Within the group of CSO representatives connected to the D & D framework, it is however worth emphasizing a distinction between two sides of an argument as to the effect of the D & D-framework's setup: a larger group describing how the flexibility inherent to D & D allows for active responses to some of the problems that arise due to restrictions and repression, versus a smaller but still sizable group who thinks otherwise. The larger group therefore recognizes D & D as a different animal relative to other donor frameworks. The smaller group however voices an opinion mirrored in one of the other Assumptions-research projects: that with the myriad of donor frameworks that their organization receives funding from for advocacy, it is hard for them in practice to clearly distinguish D & D from other donors in terms of its effects on their work, and the standard procedure for their organization therefore appears to be to find the common denominator among donors in terms of how they structure and report on their work.

6. Academic contributions

Our study adds to academic understandings of anti-NGO regulation and broader civil society restrictions, by illuminating the role that non-state actors play in repressing CSOs. We show that the repressive repertoire of particularly businesses can be similar to the extra-legal measures of governmental actors in terms of use of violence, intimidation, and investment in pro-establishment CSOs. Next to this, we show the relevance of

repression by religious groups and media.

Second, our study enriches the academic perspective on anti-NGO regulations and repression by describing more systematically the effect of such repression on how CSOs go about developing political advocacy strategies, a topic only marginally discussed so far in the literature. We show that political advocacy does change in terms of issue focus, actors targeted, and advocacy repertoire developed. Generally, advocacy becomes less contentious towards central government, eschews policy language and themes disliked by, and instead focuses on political issues deemed permissible by the current political and business elite.

Finally, our study sheds light on how repression affects transnational advocacy, in terms of the changes in how “Northern” and “Southern” CSOs collaborate to produce campaigns. We signal important changes in terms of informalization and opacity in the transnational connections between these organizations, a heightened sense of urgency with regard to the topic of safety of activists in design of campaigns, and, generally, as a result of this, a more limited range of advocacy options in terms of issues possibly covered and campaigning strategies used.

7. Contribution to knowledge and understanding on the Assumptions of the ToC

The project’s findings touch on several assumptions underlying Dialogue and Dissent’s Theory of Change (ToC), across the three themes of *Civic Space under Pressure*, *The aid chain*, and *Political Advocacy*.

First, the ToC’s assumption is that *CSOs perform 4 types of political roles to change power relations (educational, communicative, representational and cooperative)*. Our message here is that for many CSOs in our sample, the influence of repression appears to be for CSOs to start putting more emphasis on cooperative roles, relative to the other three roles. This is worth recognizing in understanding how power relations evolve as a result of CSO activities.

Second, the ToC assumes that *different CSO roles require different organizational forms and capacities*. The effect of repression for the CSOs in our sample appears to be that organizational forms and capacities change: some CSOs become informalized as organizations, and their relations to other political organizations more opaque; some CSOs see their funding base reduced due to restrictions; some choose to continue in a different legal form. In sum, it is worth considering what CSO roles are adversely affected by these changes in organizational form and capacity.

Third, the ToC assumes that *When pressured, informed or persuaded by CSOs, states and companies change their policies and practices*. This may still hold, but important to add is that we find empirical evidence that states and companies push back on CSOs doing advocacy—and pushing back does not only mean arguing against the policy stance that CSOs promote, but striking against the organizations and people doing the advocacy themselves, thereby diminishing their capacity to advocate for similar issues in a similar way in the future.

Fourth, the ToC assumes that *External aid by the Ministry and Northern CSOs can strengthen CSOs in LLMICs in their political roles through capacity building and assistance in advocacy processes* and, in the same vein, *strengthen their political roles by offering protection in hostile environments and lobbying for improved political space*. Our research in part supports both assumptions, but emphasizes a paradox: given how state and non-state repression often purposively targets CSOs with foreign allies and funding, it may be the relationship with the Netherlands (and other European and North American partners) that endangers CSOs and their staff in LLMICs with anti-CSO repressive climates. At the same time however, Dutch and other European and North American partners can do a lot financially, organizationally and politically to help CSOs cope with repression, continue advocacy and build capacity for new advocacy. Our research, however, finds little support so far that efforts by Northern governments and CSOs are increasing political space for CSOs in Bangladesh and Zambia.

Fifth, and finally, the ToC assumes that *CSOs need political space to perform political roles*. Our findings support this assumption by showing how decreasing space negatively affects CSO’s ability to advocate for specific issues and themes.

8. Policy recommendations

We would welcome interaction with Ministry staff on sensitive policy recommendations omitted here

1. Most European CSO respondents (both inside and outside the *Dialogue & Dissent* funding framework, and inside and outside of the Netherlands) have reached out to embassies and the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs to lobby for some kind of diplomatic response toward repressive governments and would *welcome more active intervention from donor governments in cases of repression*.

2. As various businesses in Zambia and Bangladesh are involved in intimidation and other forms of repression, while often supplying to Dutch buyers, it is worthwhile considering these repressive practices in the context of the engagement of Dutch firms and their corporate responsibility and human rights due diligence in their supply chains. *The Government of the Netherlands could call on Dutch multinationals to respect their due diligence obligations. In addition, Northern CSOs could put pressure on Dutch businesses to use whatever leverage they have to influence their suppliers.* In relation to supporting civic space in Bangladesh, particularly in light of the challenges from the business side, *the EU should be considered a promising avenue* for activities, given its trade agreement with Bangladesh and its importance as an export destination, which gives the EU considerable leverage to address some of the issues outlined here.
3. CSOs in both countries fear a funding squeeze in light of restrictions on civil society and would *welcome continued foreign funding, wherever possible through channels that allow for flexibility in funding activities* (in this respect, *Dialogue & Dissent* is applauded by most respondents for its flexibility). The civil society space in both countries is increasingly being co-opted by the government and business organizations, which fund 'their' CSOs, so that they speak for the status quo and against dissent. This point surfaces in most of our interviews across all types of CSOs we studied, in both Bangladesh and Zambia.
4. In some cases, the *personal reputation and 'celebrity' of CSO leaders can prevent intimidation, repression and prosecution*, because the government fears a backlash when it clamps down on these individuals. Northern CSOs could use this to their advantage when partnering with local CSOs.
5. For both countries, repression of CSOs takes place alongside other governmental and non-governmental measures and practices that are authoritarian in nature, but not explicitly focused on CSOs: obstruction of fair and open elections, unconstitutional measures with regard to leadership selection, obstruction of freedom of expression, unlawful arrests and prosecution, surveillance, and censoring of media. *Foreign policy responses should seek to address the multi-faceted form that authoritarianism by government and non-state actors takes.* This point surfaced repeatedly across the interviews with all types of CSOs in both countries, and was also an important theme during the dissemination workshop.

9. Shortcomings and ideas for further research

We were unable to describe with more precision what the size of and variation in the civil society sector, or CSO ecology is, and how many organizations, money and people are part of it. Our best guesstimate is based on four sources (Yearbook of International Organizations, USAID, OECD funding data and news media reporting on government recorded CSOs), which all likely contain false positives, and miss organizations because of false negatives. We were because of this also unable to report possible variation in growth rate CSOs according to advocacy issue. We hope to be able to do so after the end of this project, though, as new data gathering continues that sheds more light on CSOs engaged in political advocacy in countries with restrictions and repressions.

The comparison between Zambia and Bangladesh was interesting and fruitful because of mentioned similarities, but obviously there is a lot that divides the countries, which is why comparison for causal inference should be handled with care. Future work may focus on better matched comparisons of countries with relevant similarities in terms of history, geography and institutions. For now, our causal inference is based on intra-case comparison and process tracing, but comparison across different countries may bolster our findings.

Due to the relatively short time horizon of the project, we have also been unable to systematically cover intra-state variation among CSOs in their response to repression, and possible variation in non-state actor repressive activities across the country. Our stories are informed by the experience of representatives of organizations with head offices in the capital of the country, and activities across it. In the Zambian case we also covered an industrial region outside the capital. Future research may delve into further regional differences within countries.

In almost all cases we succeeded in interviewing more than one representative of a CSO in the sample and analysed policy documents to corroborate our findings on such organizations. However, adding more interviews per organization may further increase validity.

Further ideas for future research are too numerous to exhaustively cover here, but nevertheless we highlight a couple: First, both country cases broach but do not yet extensively cover what one could call an increasing

GONGO-ization and CorpoNGOization of the civil society sphere, with NGOs coming into being financed by governments and resident companies that echo the interests of these parties. Future research may analyze this phenomenon in more detail, and in particular investigate whether NGO restrictions in various countries are not so much about limiting the amount of organizations doing advocacy, but rather transforming it in the direction of voices and opinions supporting the establishment and the status quo.

Second, it would be interesting to qualitatively compare countries with NGO restrictions to countries where such restrictions are absent, or where NGO restrictions are in the process of revision. This will enable us both to understand better where restrictions emerge and why, but also establish with more certainty to what degree developments in civil society can be attributed to such restrictions.

Third, our findings leave room to further theorize and empirically investigate how changes in the form and behaviour of CSOs relate to transformation of *civil society* as a whole, so also involving possible changes in citizen opinion and behaviour, the role of media, political parties, etc. Our hunch is that there is still much to learn about how repression of CSOs affects CSO's position to other actors engaging in civil society. In turn, we need to learn much more about how repression of other parties than CSOs affects CSO behaviour.

Fourth, our findings leave room for further work on how governmental and NSA repression relate to the trend towards requiring Corporate Responsibility (CR) and human rights due diligence (HRDD) in global supply chains of multinational companies. It is evident that many companies that supply to multinationals as political actors behave in ways that are not in line with CR and HRDD requirements. Next to investigating the ramifications of this on the corporate side, it would also be interesting to investigate what this means on the side of the government like the Dutch, given its policy commitment to both civic space for CSOs on the one hand, and its policy commitment to supporting companies towards CR and HRDD on the other.

Fifth, and most obviously, the research executed here could be repeated in many other countries, looking at other types of non-state actors, so as to increase our knowledge of what kinds of repressions and restrictions are in place, and how CSOs are responding to it.

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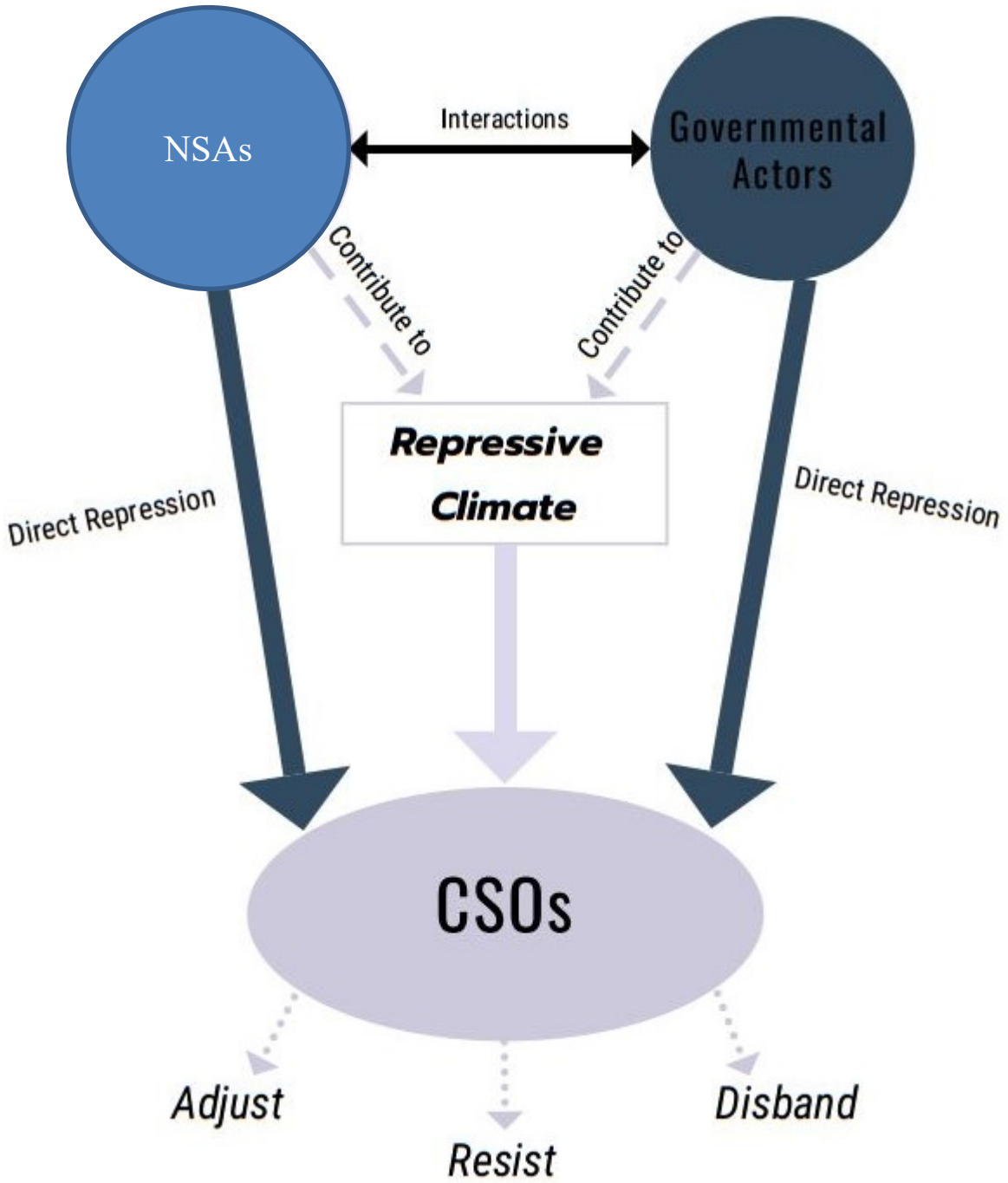
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Appendix: Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Revised analytical framework



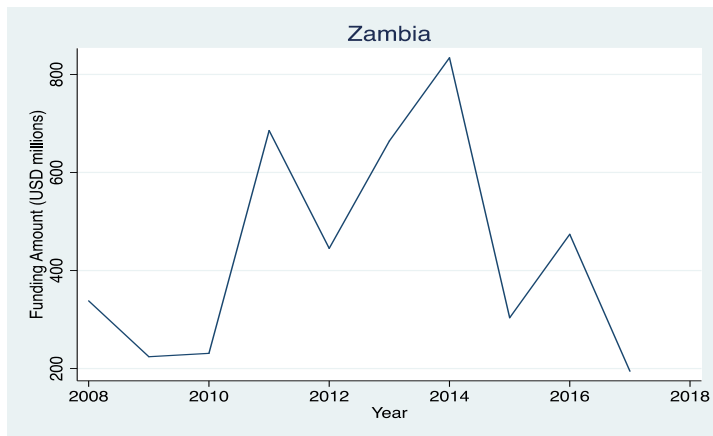


Figure 2: ODA flows to Zambian civil society organizations from European donors. Source: OECD DAC creditor reporting system (CRS)

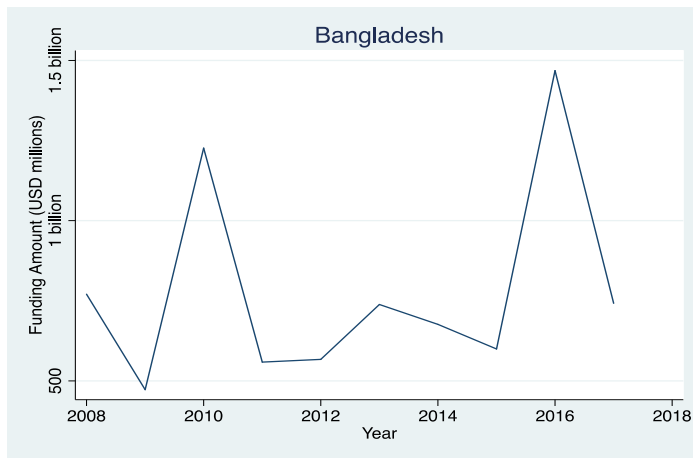


Figure 3: ODA flows to civil society organizations from European donors. Source: OECD DAC creditor reporting system (CRS)

	Connected to D & D	Not connected to D & D	Total
Bangladeshi CSOs	5	3	8
Zambian CSOs	5	3	8
Western European CSOs	6	6	12
Total	16	12	28

Table 1. CSO interview spread. Note: actual number of interviews with CSO representatives was higher, given how for most CSOs we spoke to >1 representative.

	Bangladesh	Zambia
Religious NSA	Islamic fundamentalist group	Catholic church
Business NSA	Garments export businesses	Mining export businesses
Media NSA	-	Local media

Table 2. NSA coverage of study

	Before restrictions	Present
Bangladesh sources:		
Yearbook International Organizations INGO count	786 (in 2015)	804
NGOAB registered foreign CSO count	233 (in 2014)	259
NGOAB registered local CSO count	2370 (in 2015)	2351
Dept Social Service local CSO count	57.000 (in 2015)	50.000
Zambia sources:		
Yearbook International Organizations INGO count	505 (in 2008)	534
Registrar of Societies CSO count	10.000 (in 2003)	12.000

Table 3. Amount of Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations, according to different sources. *Interpret with caution, as in all data sources depicted here, the unit of analysis (NGO) is larger than the CSOs engaging in political advocacy that are subject of this study. Moreover, given the character of data gathering in all sources used, datasets are likely to contain false positives.