

International aid and advocacy groups are influenced by their home countries' cultures

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In February, Greenpeace activist and actress Lucy Lawless, star of "Xena: Warrior Princess," was sentenced to 120 hours of community service for boarding a Shell oil rig to protest offshore Arctic drilling. Dramatic protests by Netherlands-based Greenpeace contrast sharply with the lobbying and letter-writing of the U.S.-based Sierra Club. The differences among those two groups and other international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) reflect the cultures of the nations where they are based, according to research by a University of Missouri political scientist. Individuals can use knowledge of INGOs' home nations to decide which organizations they wish to support economically.

"If potential donors don't like the characteristics of the INGOs based in their nation, they can donate to organizations based in other countries," said Amanda Murdie, assistant professor of political science in MU's College of Arts and Science. "For example, if a person wants to support an organization that works closely with elected officials, a U.S.-based INGO may be the best choice. On the other hand, if a donor prefers supporting dramatic displays in the streets, a French group would most likely exhibit the desired confrontational behavior."

Neither a confrontational nor a cooperative strategy is inherently better than the other; both can be effective, noted Murdie. However, cultural factors may outweigh the drive to use the best techniques to achieve results. INGO leaders may need to choose advocacy tools that will be socially acceptable, although those techniques might not be the most expedient means to achieve their goals. For example, a massive street

theater performance might draw the most attention to a cause, but it might not be a wise choice if the public and [government](#) view the performance as offensive or abrasive.

The degree to which organizations use confrontational techniques, such as street demonstrations, as opposed to lobbying government authorities, is strongly influenced by the relationship between the state and society in the INGOs' home nations, according to Murdie's research on 3,000 INGOs. In the U.S., moving from INGOs into government employment is common. Hence, U.S. advocacy groups are less likely to do something that might alienate future employers. Groups based in the U.S. also receive a larger percentage of their funding from the government, and therefore may avoid biting the hand that feeds them. However, in France and the United Kingdom, there is less movement from INGO jobs into government employment and less public funding for INGOs. Organizations in those nations can afford to anger the government.

More information: The study, "There's no place like home: Explaining international NGO advocacy," was published in the *Review of International Organizations*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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