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Local resources for local rights? The Mumbai fundraiser's dilemma

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ABSTRACT

Local human rights organizations (LHROs) in the global South are increasingly keen to raise funds from cocitizens and local businesses to diversify their funding, to increase their political legitimacy, and to bolster their resilience to fluctuations in international donor trends. This concern with local funds has assumed new urgency today following the global governmental crackdown on foreign aid to domestic civil society. This article focuses on the potential for local human rights fundraising in Mumbai, one of India's most important economic centers, as well as a hub of social movements and human rights organizing. Like other governments, India has launched a crackdown on foreign aid to local NGOs. Interviews with a representative sample of Mumbai's LHRO leaders indicate that they depend on foreign aid, worry about government regulation, and are keen to raise funds from the city's booming corporate sector. Our representative survey of 1,680 adults living in Mumbai and its rural environs, however, shows that LHRO fundraising among Mumbai businesses could pose an acute reputational challenge. While Indian human rights groups do enjoy some public support in Mumbai, the public's trust in these groups is statistically associated with greater *mistrust* in local businesses. LHRO leaders in Mumbai face a critical dilemma: The city's booming corporate sector presents a tempting fundraising target but any attempt to access these funds risks undermining the local rights sector's reserves of public support.

Introduction

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) addressing human rights concerns in the global South often depend on money from sources in the global North (Okafor 2006; Berkovitch and Gordon 2008; Lawrence and Dobson 2013; Ron, Pandya, and Crow 2016). Local human rights organizations (LHROs) in the developing world are keen to raise more funds from cocitizens and local businesses, however, seeking to diversify their funding base, strengthen their political legitimacy, and bolster their resilience to fluctuations in international donor trends. In Africa, one local activist recently urged NGOs to “work harder to raise local funds” (Ojigho 2014: para. 17) while another writes that the “time has come for African rights groups to look for local [financial] solutions” (Vandyck 2014: para. 3). The problem with the current global human rights funding model, a third writes, is that “it's hard to truly care about someone else's problems when they are located far away, and when their suffering doesn't impact you immediately and directly” (Ibe 2014: para. 1). Consequently, “it is we Southerners who must fund the human rights work we want to do within our own regions” (Ibe 2014: para. 4). Activists living in Brazil, Israel, India, Palestine, Mongolia, Hong Kong, Mexico, and elsewhere voice similar concerns (Ananthapadmanabhan

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🔗 Data used in the study can be obtained for purposes of replication at: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/jhr>. Several Appendices referenced in the text can also be accessed at that site.

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2013; Ibe 2014; Mendonça 2014; Murad 2014; Ojigho 2014; Pannunzio 2014; Barry 2015; Legjeem 2015; Ben-Sasson 2016; To 2016).

This concern for “local funds for local rights” assumes new urgency given the global governmental crackdown on foreign aid to domestic civil society (Christensen and Weinstein 2013; Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014; Mendelson 2015). Scholars chart a worldwide “pushback” against externally supported NGOs in low- and middle-income countries, showing these new laws are driven by political considerations. As domestic rulers seek to bolster their political standing following nationally competitive elections, they restrict foreign aid to local NGOs to curb the autonomy of such groups and to limit the support these group could provide to domestic political challengers (Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash 2016). Leaders worldwide have internalized the lessons taught by a generation of transnational activists and scholars (Wapner 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Bob 2005; Hertel 2006; Carpenter 2014). They realize that local NGOs are crucial political players in domestic and transnational politics and recognize that dependence on foreign aid is these groups’ Achilles heel.

This article focuses on the potential for local human rights fundraising in Mumbai, one of India’s largest and most important economic and cultural centers. Like many other governments, India has recently launched a crackdown on foreign aid to locally operating civil society. These restrictions are not new, however. Delhi first passed the “Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act” (FCRA) (Ministry of Law and Justice 2010) in 1976 during a national state of political emergency, seeking to curtail external aid to domestic challengers. The authorities tightened those rules further in 1985 and 2010, and following the 2014 national election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the right-wing and Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The argument, according to Modi and others, is that foreign-funded domestic groups interested in human rights, the environment, and related causes are undermining the country’s economic development.¹

Although our interviews with LHRO leaders in Mumbai were conducted in 2010 and 2011— three years prior to the latest Indian government crackdown on foreign aid to local NGOs — most respondents were keenly aware of existing FCRA-related restrictions. Many, moreover, were eager to develop their local fundraising capacities. As one LHRO leader told us, “access to foreign funds is becoming difficult... so, very definitely, organizations are looking [for] Indian sources of funding.”² This interest in local funding is nothing new for Indian civil society, as it builds on a concern for self-reliance dating back at least to the country’s decolonization struggles. As one commentator notes, “Even in the direst of circumstances, [independence leader Mahatma] Gandhi followed a strategy that focused on self-reliance” (Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash 2015a).³ Still, LHRO leaders in Mumbai are increasingly committed to pursuing local funds.

Many LHRO leaders are also keen to explore fundraising with Mumbai and India’s booming business community, referred to locally as the “corporates.” As one Mumbai LHRO leader explained, “There is a lot of corporate funding available and we are looking for those sources.”⁴ These plans make sense, given that Mumbai’s business sector is one of India’s most vigorous, is located in one of the country’s wealthiest cities (Clark and Moonen 2014; Directorate of Economics and Statistics 2015; Parilla et al. 2015) and is increasingly interested in corporate social responsibility, in part due to a 2013 federal law requiring large businesses to donate to charitable causes.⁵

Our representative survey of 1,680 adults living in Mumbai and its rural environs, however, suggests that any attempt at LHRO fundraising with corporates could pose reputational risks. Although local rights groups do enjoy some public support in Mumbai, trust in these groups is statistically associated with greater *mistrust* in local businesses, controlling for other factors. The reasons for this association, we believe, are twofold. First, many of Mumbai’s local rights groups have emerged from the left-wing strand of Indian political organizing, much of which is skeptical of corporate actors at global and national levels. Second, successive governments have portrayed human rights actors in India as the enemies of economic growth, influencing the public’s perception of these organizations. Contrary to the fears of some Marxist scholars, in other words, “human rights” in Mumbai is not identified with individualism, property rights, and capital but rather with collectivist, left-wing politics opposed to untrammelled capitalist growth.

This association between trust in Indian human rights groups and *mistrust* in Indian corporates creates a dilemma for Mumbai's rights groups. Although the city's booming business sector offers exciting opportunities for local fundraising, any concerted attempt to access these funds could undermine the public's trust in their organizations. As such, Mumbai's human rights groups do not face the same opportunities enjoyed by groups such as the New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), which regularly and unapologetically raises funds from US business leaders.⁶ They also do not enjoy the same opportunities enjoyed by smaller US groups such as Human Rights First (New York) or the Advocates for Human Rights (Minneapolis), which raise much of their funds from the established and wealthy law firms that work with major local and national businesses. In Mumbai, human rights fundraising among the titans of business could be a reputational liability with their public base.

Background: Mumbai's business and nonprofit sectors

Mumbai, India's financial, commercial, and cultural capital, has a gross domestic product (GDP) of over 150 billion dollars, the country's second highest (Parilla et al. 2015). Before and during British rule, Mumbai's economic prowess rested on its status as the subcontinent's leading port and textile-manufacturing center; postindependence, the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, along with a burgeoning informal sector, became Mumbai's new drivers of growth. Over the last 25 years, the city's economy has shifted from trade and manufacturing to one based on services, leading to even greater comparative and absolute growth. As a result, Mumbai is home to many domestic and international banks, insurance companies, the national stock exchange, and thousands of domestic corporations, including some of India's largest conglomerates, such as Reliance Industries, the Tata Group, and the Aditya Birla Group. Mumbai also is headquarters to many of India's largest companies, well ahead of any other Indian city. Its ports handle over a third of India's foreign trade. Mumbai-based firms supply nearly 60% of India's customs duties along with 40% of its income tax revenues (Clark and Moonen 2014). Many wealthy individuals have made Mumbai their home, including the chairman of Reliance Industries, Mukesh Ambani, whose net worth is reportedly USD 21 billion (Forbes 2016).

Mumbai is also a center of social movement and nonprofit organizing, however, with a plethora of groups engaging in service provision and advocacy. Some of these groups and movements label their activities in "human rights" terms. Organizing along explicit "human rights" lines began in India during the 1970s, following electoral fraud and the government's declaration of a national state of emergency, and most of the country's first formal rights groups focused on returning the country to electoral democracy (Ray 2003; V. Patel 2010). In the 1980s, the number of explicitly identified "human rights" groups increased, and, while some continued to focus on liberal political rights, others identified more closely with social and political struggles on the political left (Gudavarthy 2008). By the 1990s, experts discerned three broad, nonmutually exclusive LHRO subtypes in India: (1) issue-specialized social movements and their associated NGOs working for the rights of women, Dalits, and the environment; (2) LHROs addressing communal tensions, minorities, and intergroup violence; and (3) LHROs focused on protecting individuals and communities from the challenges of economic liberalization and globalization.⁷ All of these subtypes continued to thrive in the new millennium and achieved a number of successes, including legal support for citizens' right to information, education, food, and to the sexual preference of their choice.⁸

Mumbai's nonprofit rights sector has developed along similar lines. In the late 1970s and 1980s, most of the city's LHROs focused on civil liberties, while in the 1980s, in response to planned slum evictions, many focused on the rights of slum and pavement dwellers.⁹ Mumbai also became a hub of women's rights activism in those years, and other LHROs focused on justice for victims of the 1992–1993 communal riots. More recently, the Ration Kirti Samiti (RKS) network of Mumbai- and Maharashtra-based organizations has tried to galvanize activism around inequities in public food distribution.¹⁰ Other Mumbai rights groups focus on all manner of specific issues, including the right to education, health, information, and the rights of LGBT individuals.

Over time, many in the Indian human rights community have come to self-identify — and to be identified as such by others — as part of the broader Indian political left, much of which has mobilized

against the country's market-oriented reforms over the last 25 years. As India has opened up its markets and resources to foreign investors and imports, the country's corporate sector has aggressively pursued globalization, with particular emphasis on Mumbai (S. Patel 2003: 17–22). The political left has warned against this integration into global capitalism, arguing that it will increase domestic inequalities, strip citizens of their access to basic entitlements and undermine the country's commitment to the poor and lower middle class (Roy 1999; Basavarajappa 2014; Roy 2014). Moreover, Indian rights groups, along with other organizations using rights-related rhetoric, have long been at the forefront of social movement struggles against assorted mega-development projects (Khagram 2004). Some have worked for the rights of people displaced by large hydroelectric dams, others oppose nuclear power plants, corruption, and violation of environmental laws, and still others challenge the government's takeover of property for sale or lease to developers, mining companies, and others. In Mumbai, where government, real estate developers, and investors are particularly eager to accelerate growth, LHROs are increasingly focused on protecting the rights of the city's many slum and pavement dwellers.

Successive Indian governments have long criticized domestic rights groups for joining the country's antidevelopment alliance, and these criticisms escalated after Prime Minister Modi's election in 2014. For example, not long after the new administration came into office, a leaked internal report by the country's Intelligence Bureau alleged that protests against development projects were being fueled by foreign NGOs such as Greenpeace, Amnesty, and ActionAid. These protests, the bureau claimed, had slowed the country's economic growth considerably (Mashru 2014). Prime Minister Modi has expressed particular concern over what he called India's foreign-funded "five-star activists" and has encouraged the Ministry of Home Affairs to revoke the FCRA permits of many NGOs (Sharma and Sharma 2015; Tripathi 2015). As one commentator put it, the "rhetoric against [Indian and foreign NGOs] has become rooted.... Judgments about who can be trusted to mean well for India, and who cannot, have become a crucial part of government policy" (Subramanian 2015: para. 16).

To be sure, previous governments shared many of these sentiments, including the government of the day in 2010–2011, when we conducted our interviews with Mumbai's LHRO leaders, and in 2012–2013, when we conducted our survey of the Mumbai public. In fact, it was the previous Congress-led government that had commissioned the secret Intelligence Bureau report in the first place, passed the more stringent 2010 version of the country's FCRA law and, in 2012, criticized foreign-funded NGOs as "not fully appreciative of the development challenges" in India (Raj 2012). In 2013, the Congress government also suspended the FCRA permit of the Indian Social Action Forum—a network of 700 NGOs and peoples' movements working on various human rights issues (Lakshmi 2013).

The Mumbai LHRO leader sample

To learn more about funding for Mumbai's LHROs, we identified 57 registered rights groups in the year 2010, using extensive online searches, key informant interviews, and telephone verification.¹¹ Each of these groups mentioned the word "rights" in their title, mission statement, or in a description of at least one of their major activities. We then randomly chose 30 (52% of the total) for semi-structured, face-to-face interviews averaging 66 minutes, in English or Hindi.¹² As Table 1 shows, most LHROs offered a senior staff member for interview, the majority of whom were highly educated.¹³ Although these groups were scattered across the city, many were headquartered in the wealthier southern part of the city, where law firms, the High Court, and Maharashtra State headquarters cluster. The groups reported a median staff size of 50, of whom 67%, on average, were paid; the remainder of staff worked on a nonpaid, or voluntary, basis.

Many of the LHROs in our sample combined service provision with human rights advocacy, indicating they were participants in the "rights-based approach" to development, an increasingly popular trend as of the late 1990s (Kindornay, Ron, and Carpenter 2012). Half were founded prior to 1990, indicating that Mumbai's nongovernmental rights sector is relatively well established.¹⁴

The issues these LHROs worked on were diverse, as noted above, and many groups worked on more than one specific issue. Of the 30 groups we interviewed, 10 focused on human rights for marginalized

Table 1. LHRO leader and organization characteristics.

Gender	43% women
Age (mean)	51 years
Education	
Completed secondary	100%
Attended university	100%
For at least four years	86%
Position at LHRO	
Years at current LHRO (median)	12 years
Senior staff position	97%
Work-related international trips in past five years (median)	0.5 trips
Had not taken a work-related international trip in past five years	50%
LHRO Establishment	
Year (median)	1989–1990
Before 1993	57%
From 1993–2000	20%
From 2001–2010	23%
LHRO Staff	
Paid staff (mean)	67%
Number (median)	50 staff
Bottom third	1–15 staff
LHRO Funding	
Receive government funding	40%
Receive foreign funding	67%

populations, generally conceived; nine focused on women’s rights or women and children’s rights; six focused on children’s rights; two focused on housing and socioeconomic rights; one focused on disability rights; one focused on LGBT rights; and one focused on corruption. None of the groups specifically dedicated themselves to anticorporate activism.

For the full sampling frame of all the Mumbai-based LHROs we were able to identify, see Appendix 1 available at the JHR Harvard Dataverse site along with replication data for this article. To safeguard respondent confidentiality, however, we do not specify which 30 groups we interviewed.

The political economy of Mumbai’s LHROs

Given political sensitivities on issues of foreign funding to domestic civil society, we did not initially ask LHRO leaders for specific details about their own organization’s finances. Instead, we asked a more general question about the sector overall: “*In your view, what percentage of human rights organizations in Mumbai receive substantial funding from foreign donors such as Europe or Japan?*” Although some replied that they “didn’t know,” almost half estimated that “most” Mumbai rights groups received “substantial” foreign funding (see Figure 1). Towards the end of the LHRO leader interview, we asked a more targeted question: “*Does your organization receive foreign funding?*” In response, 67% of the LHRO leader sample said “yes.” We did not ask for further specifics, however, so as to not trigger respondent concern.

In the course of the interview, we asked another general question about the effect of foreign aid: “*If foreign funding for human rights work in Mumbai was cut off, would local human rights activities collapse entirely, collapse somewhat, stay the same, grow somewhat, or grow a lot?*” Over half (58 percent) responded that local rights activities would collapse “somewhat” or “entirely.” As one leader noted, “Organizations won’t shut down, but their total manpower, their activit[ies], their number of programs, the kind of qualitative impact they are able to make will definitely get adversely affected.”¹⁵ Or as another explained, organizations would have to find new sources of funding, or close down. After all, “nobody will work for free.”¹⁶

Although these findings only capture LHRO-leader *perceptions*, they are the best estimates available of the LHRO sector. Indeed, the only systematic study of Mumbai NGOs overall — conducted with representatives of 67 local groups in 1994 — also found that two thirds of sampled organizations

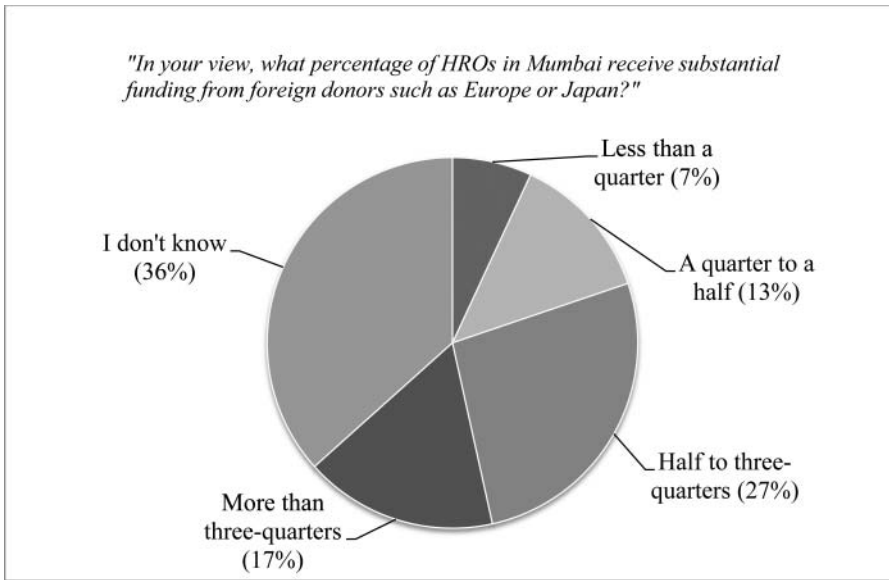


Figure 1. Respondents believe that most LHROs receive substantial foreign funding ($N = 30$).

received foreign funding, and that domestic funding comprised only a small portion of total funding (Desai 1999).

Both scholars and activists argue that India's strict regulations on foreign aid to civil society (the FCRA rules) give officials the tools they need to weaken organizations deemed threatening (Sen 1992; Nair 2013). Indeed, some claim that the government routinely denies FCRA to almost all NGOs in politically sensitive states, such as Jammu and Kashmir (Jalali 2008: 176–179). As discussed above, the Modi government — elected in 2014 — did not change the FCRA rules themselves; instead, it began enforcing them more rigorously. It revoked some groups' FCRA permits, froze other NGOs' foreign exchange accounts and put some international donors on a watch list so as to better scrutinize their local activities (Bidwai 2015; Najar 2015).

Although Mumbai is located in Maharashtra State, not one of the country's most politically sensitive, several LHRO leaders told us they did have a hard time obtaining the FCRA permit. This was particularly true for groups that were smaller, had fewer personal connections to the Home Ministry or that worked on issues of state accountability. As one LHRO leader explained, "There is a lot of pressure [and] surveillance from government sources... Not giving [NGOs] an FCRA is one way of throttling an organization and throttling its campaigns and activities."¹⁷ Officials have discretion over implementation of FCRA rules, subtly channeling foreign aid to less threatening groups and causes.

Given these challenges, Mumbai's LHRO leaders told us they *were* interested, in theory, in developing their local fundraising capacities. In fact, 70 percent of the leaders we interviewed answered "yes" when asked whether local fundraising was "a possibility," although 70 percent *also* said that "very few" (43 percent) or "some" (27 percent) rights groups currently receive "substantial" local funding (see Figure 2). Most acknowledged that the local rights sector depended on foreign aid — only 13 percent estimated that "most" groups received "most" of their funding from local sources — but many were frustrated at this state of affairs. The desire for local alternatives to foreign support was palpable.

When asked to list potential local funders, LHRO leaders mentioned ordinary people living in the city ($n = 18$) or "corporates" ($n = 17$), the local term for the business sector; others listed local charitable foundations ($n = 7$) or the government ($n = 12$). Local fundraising was certainly possible, one leader explained, because charity has long been engrained in Indian culture. Muslims give a portion of their salary to *zakat*, Christians donate regularly to churches, and Hindus give to a wide range of charitable and religious institutions.¹⁸

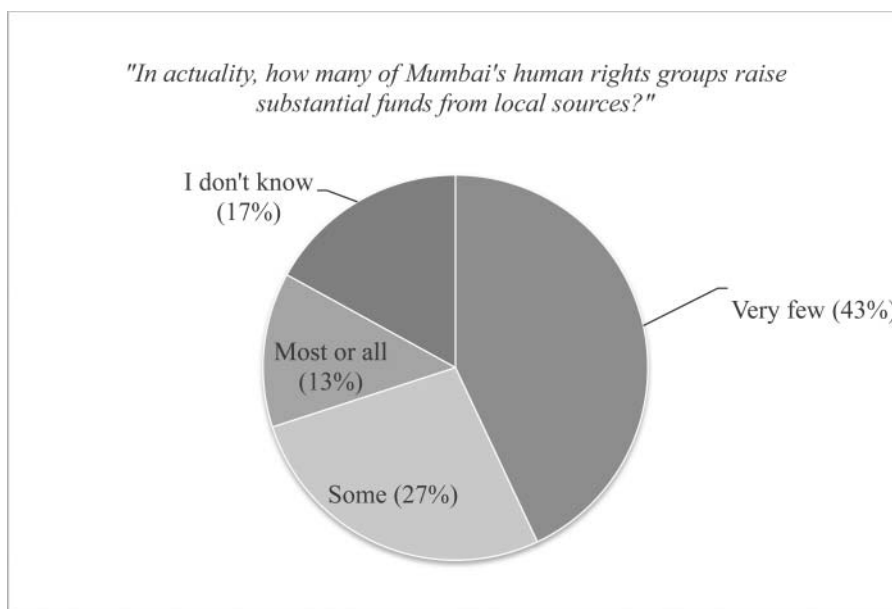


Figure 2. Respondents report few LHROs raise significant local funds ($N = 30$).

Yet, LHRO leaders also recognized that fundraising with individuals is difficult and resource intensive, requiring a large and well-trained staff. As one leader explained, "There are a lot of rich people who are willing to give money...they are happy getting an income tax exemption personally because they have donated money to an organization...but then, one needs to locate those people and be in touch with them, or else do a fundraising show [and] invite those people."¹⁹ These efforts are even more resource intensive when LHROs seek funds through direct mail, telephone, or one-on-one personal contact.

Unfortunately, we did not ask LHRO leaders a specific, detailed question on their own fundraising strategies, at home and abroad. We deemed this to be too politically sensitive. Still, the issue of domestic fundraising came up repeatedly in our conversations with LHRO leaders, and only one said they had systematically, and purposefully, sought to raise funds from the general Indian public. This group — Child Rights and You (CRY) — has been uniquely able to conduct systematic public fundraising in India because it had received foreign support to build its local fundraising capacity (Mahal 2002: 111–112) and because its stated mission — helping Indian children — is both politically innocuous and emotionally attractive.

Given the challenges of raising funds from individuals, some LHRO leaders said they hoped to raise money from local corporates, despite their sector's long-established skepticism towards business. To be sure, many realized that corporate fundraising would be challenging, as most businesses prefer to focus on noncontroversial issues and seek short-term, verifiable impacts. Others realized that corporate funding could come with political strings attached. Nonetheless, many of the LHRO leaders we interviewed saw potential in Mumbai's growing discourse surrounding corporate social responsibility. As one explained, "Things in the funding scenario are changing now. We have a lot of local companies and... a lot of entrepreneurs are interested [in] corporate social responsibility."²⁰ Many corporations are establishing charitable foundations and "adopting" NGOs.²¹ As another noted, "All major corporates [in Mumbai]...have their own foundations." Some have long had charitable foundations, but today, "practically every corporate is [setting up] its own foundation."²² And, while many of these may shy away from contentious political issues, most would gladly consider less sensitive topics, even when framed in human rights terms. As one LHRO leader noted, "So long as it's mainstream ... groups fighting for ... children's rights or women's rights, corporates would have no issues."²³ Or as another noted, some "clearly get [the rights-based approach]"²⁴ and may even be willing to drop their focus on quantifiable outcomes. The "[t]hinking has changed," they explained, and Mumbai's corporations now

understand “that they need to have a sustained contribution and involvement to show change.”²⁵ Mumbai’s booming business sector, it seems, is an increasingly attractive fundraising target for the city’s rights activists.

The Indian government, for its part, has strongly encouraged corporate social responsibility through donations. In 2013, the federal government passed a bill requiring charitable donations for all companies of a certain size; this legislation, which came into force in April 2014, is the first of its kind worldwide. The new law requires companies with a net worth of 5 billion rupees (USD 93 million), turnover of 10 billion rupees (USD 186 million), or a net profit of more than 50 million rupees (USD 0.93 million) to give 2 percent of their average net income to corporate social responsibility initiatives (Ministry of Corporate Affairs 2013). And, while some corporations may channel these new funds through their own foundations, others are partnering with implementing organizations, including NGOs (Weeme 2015). The new law’s enforcement measures and impacts are still unclear, but its mere existence is unprecedented and is likely to increase the pool of local money available to at least some of Mumbai’s LHROs.

Corporate fundraising in Mumbai is clearly of interest to some LHRO leaders. Although many have internalized their sector’s skepticism towards capitalism, they realize that the corporates offer a remarkable opportunity to escape their dependence on foreign donors. Our survey of the Mumbai public, however, suggests that any concerted LHRO fundraising effort of this sort has serious reputational risks, since the Mumbai public’s trust in LHROs is associated with greater *mistrust* in local business.

Public trust in Indian HROs

To gauge the Mumbai public’s support for local rights organizations, we conducted multistage cluster sampling of 1,680 adults aged 18 and over in December 2012 and January 2013.²⁶ Our Indian survey partner, C-Voter, polled 1,380 Mumbai residents (including booster samples of roughly 150 Christians and 150 Buddhists), along with a booster sample of 300 rural residents in the surrounding Maharashtra State. Our enumerators conducted 51 percent of the interviews in Hindi and 49 percent in Marathi. Our primary sampling units were legislative assembly segments (Stage #1 of our multistage effort); within each of these, we randomly selected polling booth districts, our secondary sampling units (Stage #2). We then selected the first potential respondent from each booth’s electoral roll (Stage #3) and then selected additional persons to interview from that same electoral roll at predetermined intervals (Stage #4). These interviews lasted 48 minutes, on average, with a range of 33–90 minutes. The response rate was 48 percent, and the estimated survey margin of error was ± 2.5 percent. The poll is representative of adults living in Mumbai and rural Maharashtra State.

Our dependent variable in statistical analysis is *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organizations*, scaled from 0 = “least trust” to 1 = “most trust.” In the original question, we asked for a 4-point scale, but rescaled to 0–1 for statistical analysis and comparability with other country surveys, where we used a different scale (Ron and Crow 2015). This variable aggregates responses to our question—*How much trust do you place in the following institutions, groups, or persons*—followed by a list of 17 international and domestic actors, including “Indian human rights organizations.”²⁷ We systematically rotated the latter’s position among the other 15 options so as to avoid order bias or contaminating results through proximity to strongly liked, or disliked, institutions. Among our target population, average *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organizations* in 2012–2013 was 0.52, higher than the Mumbai public’s average trust in politicians (0.43), akin to its trust in the police (0.53), but lower than its trust in religious institutions (0.63) and the Indian army (0.63).²⁸ Local human rights groups have earned *some* public trust in Mumbai — after all, they are more trusted than politicians — but are not trusted as much as LHRO leaders might want or hope. In related cross-national work, we find that the public in Mumbai trusts human rights groups less than publics in Mexico and Lagos, Nigeria, but more than in Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco (Ron et al. 2016).

Our survey partners did not mention specific groups when asking about trust in “Indian human rights organizations.” As such, we do not know what, specifically, respondents were thinking when they supplied their answers. However, we did ask respondents if they could themselves name a specific

human rights organization in India, and only 13 respondents out of 1,680 were able to do so. Of these 13 responses, moreover, none corresponded with the 57 Mumbai-based LHROs identified in our sampling frame.²⁹ And yet, 1,425 out of 1,680 respondents, or 84 percent, responded to the question about trust in LHROs.

Given the lack of specific knowledge about Indian or Mumbai-based LHROs, is it even meaningful to ask respondents for their “trust in Indian human rights organizations?” Given the diversity of local rights groups and policy areas, moreover, can we really say anything meaningful about such an abstract concept? We believe so. It is meaningful to ask respondents for their trust in “doctors,” “accountants,” or “judges,” even if they cannot name individual members of that profession. It is also meaningful to ask about trust in “politicians,” even if respondents cannot name their specific political representative, or about “trust in the US government,” even if respondents can’t name many US officials. Publics form general impressions of sectors, professions, governments, or organizations based on the total information they absorb from their environment, regardless of their detailed knowledge of specific actors, individuals, or organizations.

Survey researchers have also grappled with analogous questions in other fields and have concluded, for the most part, that generalizing about abstractions such as “trust” can indeed be useful. Consider comparative democratization, where scholars routinely measure “satisfaction with democracy” (Canache Mondak, and Seligson 2001; Crow 2010). One prominent interpretation argues that the concept is best thought of as a summary measure expressing the respondent’s overall judgment about democracy, into which different subcomponents enter with greater or lesser proportion (Clarke, Dutt, and Kornberg 1993). “Satisfaction with democracy” is both conceptually and empirically useful because it predicts important forms of political participation, including voting and protest. Similar arguments apply to other intriguing measures, including “feeling thermometers” and “presidential approval” ratings in US electoral studies (Iyengar 1980; Wilcox, Sigelman, and Cook 1989; Cohen 2000; Gronke and Newman 2003; Nelson 2008). Although both are polyvalent concepts, they have empirically definable content and meaningful statistical associations—including causal ones—with a variety of important outcomes, including electoral choices and legislative outcomes.

Reasoning analogously, “trust in Indian human rights organizations” is also a summary measure, a global judgment about the local rights sector as a whole. We can think of this summary measure as a weighted average of sorts, comprising different components. One of these is the type of organization that an individual respondent is thinking about, while another is the particular policy domain within which a given rights organization operates. Our research does not measure these specific components but rather summarizes and encapsulates the respondents’ overall judgment of the organized, nongovernmental rights sector.

Another concern for this type of analysis is that we may, essentially, be measuring proclivity to trust *in general*. To account for this, our statistical analyses include a control measure of the mean of each individual’s trust in all 17 institutions we asked about. Since some people are more trusting than others, *Average Trust* helps us highlight the impact of trust in specific institutions over and above respondents’ average propensity to trust.

Our independent variable is *Trust in Indian Corporates*, also scaled from 0 = “least trust” to 1 = “most trust.” Intriguingly, the public’s average trust in this actor was 0.59, higher than *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organizations* (0.52). If public support for local rights groups is indeed driven by *mistrust* in the private sector, we expect statistical analysis to reveal that *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organizations* is both significantly and inversely associated with *Trust in Indian Corporates*, all other things equal.

To situate our dependent and independent trust variables in context, consider Figure 3, which displays the Mumbai public’s average trust in multiple institutions, including (in order of most to least trusted) the army, religious institutions, general population, Indian corporates, the national legislature (Lok Sabha), prime minister, the police, Indian human rights groups, foreign powers (multinational corporations and the US government combined), and politicians. These comparative data indicate that the public’s trust in the domestic private sector is comparatively high.

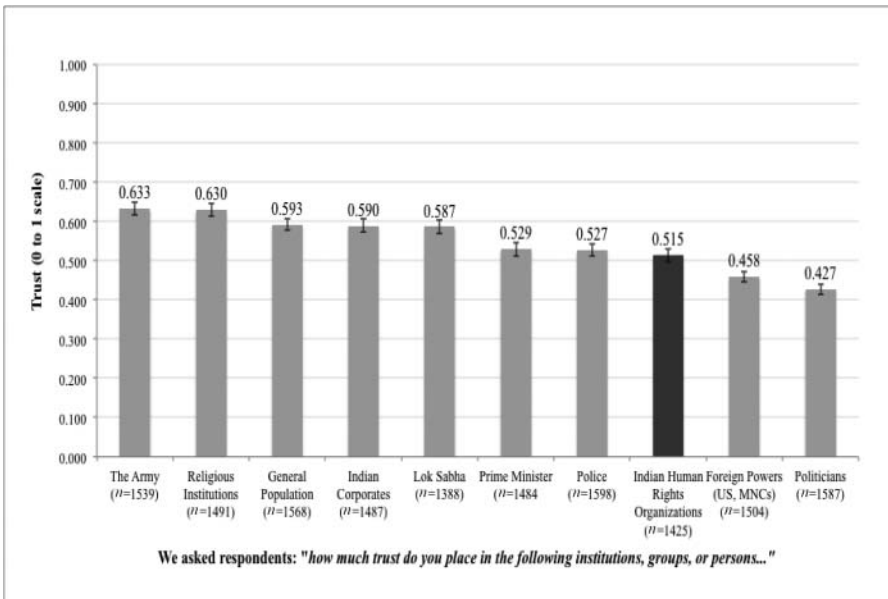


Figure 3. Trust in local and international institutions.

Our statistical models control for a wide variety of potential influences on public *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organizations*.³⁰ Since earlier work established cross-nationally that public trust in local rights groups is influenced by demographics and socioeconomic status (SES), we control for *Age*, *Sex*, *Residence Type* (urban or rural), *Education* (years), *Household Income* (subjective measure), *Rooms in Home*, *Have Mobile Phone*, *Have Landline*, and *Internet Use*. Given the often politicized nature of human rights advocacy and activism, moreover, we control for respondents' preferred choice of state-level *Political Party*, as well as their report of having *Voted* or not in the most recent national elections. And since confessional dynamics are important factors in Mumbai and India more generally (Varshney 2002), we control for *Religious Identity*. Given the social, economic, and political weight of caste in India (Jodhka 2010), we control for respondents' self-reported *Caste Identity*; and, given the importance of language politics in Mumbai and India more generally (S. Patel 2003; Guha 2007; Sarangi 2009), we control for the *Language* respondents reported speaking at home.

Since previous research also demonstrates that exposure to, and familiarity with, human rights ideas, workers, organizations, and activities is relevant, we control for these through a *Human Rights Contact Index*, which combines measures of how often respondents reported hearing the phrase, "human rights," whether they reported ever having met someone whom they consider a human rights worker, whether they could name a specific "human rights" organization when asked, and whether they could remember ever having participated in what they consider to have been some kind of "activity" of a rights-based organization. And since scholars suggest attitudes may be influenced by transnational diffusion processes (Calhoun 2002; Smith and Wiest 2005; Tarrow 2005), we control for respondents' report of whether they have ever *Lived Abroad* and the number of times they have *Traveled Abroad* for reasons of work, education, and more.

Since previous work demonstrates cross-nationally that *Trust in Local Human Rights Organizations* is influenced by respondent attitudes towards other powerful actors, we control for *Trust in Foreign Powers* (an index of respondent trust in the US government and multinationals) and *Trust in Domestic Political Power* (an index of respondent trust in Indian politicians, prime minister, and the legislature). And finally, as noted above, we control for each individual's personal propensity to trust — *Average Trust* — by averaging their response across all 16 trust categories.

The correlates of public trust in Indian HROs: Statistical results

Our models predict *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organizations* with ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, the simplest and most easily interpretable technique. We double check our findings with ordinal logistic regression and find that the results are essentially the same.³¹ Table 2 presents the

Table 2. OLS regression of trust in Indian human rights organizations on trust in Indian corporates.

Variables	β	SE
Trust in Indian Corporates	-0.163**	0.0364
Controls		
Demographics		
Sex	0.0242	0.0193
Age	-0.000792	0.000673
Socioeconomic Status		
Urban or rural residence	0.0128	0.0303
Education	0.000497	0.00244
Household Income	-0.00274	0.0109
Rooms	-0.000170	0.00907
Mobile telephone	-0.0221	0.0285
Landline telephone	-0.0241	0.0256
Internet Use	0.0217	0.0282
Political Party (Reference = No Party Preference)		
Indian National Congress (INC)	-0.00859	0.0350
National Congress Party (NCP)	-0.115**	0.0415
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	0.0119	0.0419
Shiv Sena	-0.0387	0.0356
Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS)	-0.0565	0.0432
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	-0.0396	0.0544
Republican Party of India (RPI)	-0.0688	0.0544
Other Party (IND)	0.0460	0.0941
Voting Behavior		
Voted	0.0391	0.0431
Religious Identity (Reference = Catholic)		
Protestant/Evangelical Christian	-0.0741	0.109
Other Christian	0.0908	0.138
Hindu	0.0771 ⁺	0.0457
Jewish	-0.0799	0.109
Muslim	0.0818	0.0557
Buddhist	0.0413	0.0547
Jain	0.134	0.104
Parsi	0.199	0.196
Sikh	0.0624	0.140
No Religion	0.110	0.275
Caste Identity (Reference = Scheduled Caste)		
Scheduled Tribe	0.00194	0.0269
Other Backward Classes	-0.0131	0.0326
Other	-0.0134	0.0309
Language (Reference = English)		
Marathi	-0.0357	0.0549
Hindi	-0.0923	0.0578
Gujarati	-0.129 ⁺	0.0712
Other	-0.0225	0.0628
Other Controls		
Human Rights Contact Index	0.124 ⁺	0.0637
Lived Abroad	0.0657	0.195
Trips Abroad	0.0353*	0.0160
Trust in Foreign Powers (US Govt & MNCs)	-0.161**	0.0449
Trust in Domestic Authorities (Pols, Exec, Leg)	-0.288**	0.0571
Average Trust	1.496**	0.123
Constant	0.0587	0.104
Observations		861
R-squared		.261

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. ⁺ $p < .1$.

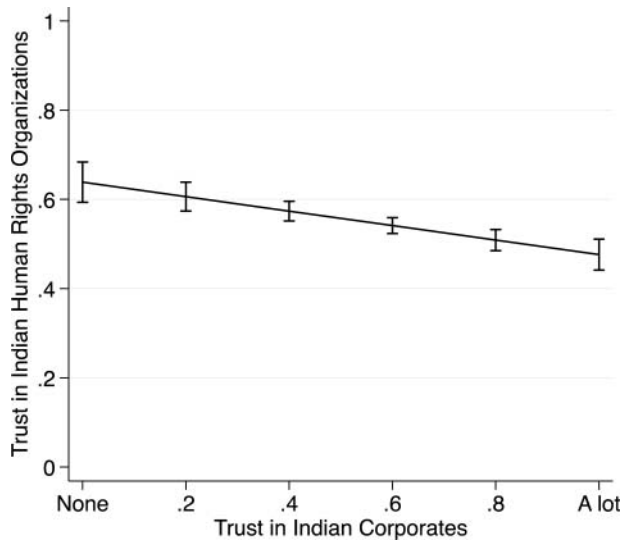


Figure 4. Predicted values of trust in Indian human rights organizations at different levels of trust in Indian corporates.

results of our OLS regression. See Appendix 2 available at the JHR Harvard Dataverse site along with replication data for this article for a full list of the survey questions corresponding to the variables that are in the model.

As expected, *Trust in Indian Corporates* is both inversely and significantly related to *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organizations*, controlling for other potential influences. And as [Figure 4](#) demonstrates, this finding is also substantively meaningful; the public's predicted *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organizations* is 0.64 when *Trust in Indian Corporates* is set at 0 or maximum distrust. And when *Trust in Indian Corporates* is set at 1, or maximum trust, predicted *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organizations* drops to 0.48. Members of the Mumbai public who entirely mistrust businesses, in other words, are roughly 33 percent *more* trusting of local human rights groups, controlling for other potential influences. [Table 2](#) and [Figure 4](#) show that this difference is both statistically significant and substantively meaningful.

Some of our other findings are as expected. As previous research discovered, trust in foreign powers and domestic political authorities is inversely related to trust in local rights groups; LHRO supporters are overall skeptical of concentrated political and economic power in their own country and abroad. The human rights contact index is as statistically significant and positively associated with trust in local rights groups, as is the number of trips abroad and average respondent trust. Intriguingly, supporters of the National Congress Party are less trusting, on average, than those with no particular political preference, while Hindus are more trusting than Catholics. More research on these counts is warranted. Importantly, none of the sociodemographic or caste controls are significant.

Overall, these findings suggest that *Trust in Indian Human Rights Organization* is part and parcel of a broader ideological orientation, rather than a product of concrete sociodemographic attributes. The most salient aspect of this orientation, for our purposes, is that trust in local corporations is inversely related to trust in local human rights groups.

Conclusion

Governments worldwide are cracking down on foreign aid to local NGOs, fearing these groups may be lending too much support to domestic political challengers and their transnational allies (Christensen and Weinstein 2013; Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014; Mendelson 2015; Dupuy et al. 2016). This

legal crackdown on foreign aid has placed local human rights organizations (LHROs) at a particular disadvantage, since rights groups are often the most politically oppositional of local NGOs, as well as the most heavily dependent on foreign funds (Berkovitch and Gordon 2008; Ron et al. 2016). In some cases, these foreign aid crackdowns have led to the wholesale collapse of the domestic human rights sector (Dupuy et al. 2015b).

Local rights groups worldwide, along with their global North-based donors and other international allies, are scrambling to respond. One potential solution is increased emphasis on “local funds for local [human rights] issues,” in which local NGOs diversify their sources of funding away from international sources and focus on the local supporters (Ojigho 2014). Today, domestic rights activists from Latin America to Africa and Southeast Asia say they are keen to explore this option.

This article explores the potential for local fundraising in Mumbai, India, one of the global South’s most economically vigorous urban locations, as well as a major hub of nonprofit organizing, including for human rights. Our interviews with a representative sample of LHRO leaders in Mumbai demonstrate that these groups depend on foreign funding, rendering them vulnerable to government restrictions. India passed strong regulations limiting foreign aid to local civil society as early as 1976 and has amended those laws several times since. In 2014, moreover, a newly elected government resolved to enforce those regulations with even greater stringency, fearing that local NGOs, including human rights groups, were undermining the country’s economic growth.

Mumbai’s LHRO leaders are keen to respond to these restrictions with greater local fundraising attempts. Many local rights leaders believe Mumbai’s booming corporate sector is a desirable fundraising target, given its wealth and growing interest in corporate social responsibility, a trend the current government is keen to encourage. However, any LHRO attempt at fundraising with Mumbai’s corporate sector could prove challenging, given the public’s tendency to associate trust in local rights groups with mistrust in local businesses. Following decades of organizational and social movement culture, as well as government criticism, the public identifies local rights groups as somehow positioned *against* private business, rather than as potential allies of business. This may be because India’s local rights groups have, in the past, allied with the country’s political left, which has been skeptical of the government’s opening to foreign markets, and encouragement of capitalist growth, over the past 25 years.

Having built their reputation over the past few decades as part of the struggle *against* capitalism, LHROs now face the Mumbai’s fundraiser’s dilemma: The city’s corporate sector is flush with cash and interested in giving, but the public has come to identify corporates and rights groups as inherently opposed. Should LHRO leaders emulate the fundraising patterns of global peers and approach local businesses for financial support, their reputations might suffer. Should they *not* build a greater capacity for local fundraising, however, they will continue to depend on foreign aid in an era of increasing government scrutiny and regulation. Mumbai’s LHROs cannot afford not to pursue local fundraising opportunities, and local corporates offer one of their most likely funding solutions. And yet, any such attempt could exact a steep reputational price among the sector’s supporters among the general public.

There are, of course, several ways to address this problem of reputational risk. First, LHROs in Mumbai could focus more heavily on raisings funds from the general public rather than the corporate sector. This is the strategy pursued by the one LHRO we know of in Mumbai that does have a systematic domestic fundraising strategy. Second, LHROs could fundraise among India’s corporates but could develop a strict code of conduct that requires them to publicly and transparently vet would-be donors for their human rights practices, commitments, and records. Third, Mumbai’s LHROs could choose to focus on issues where there is no apparent conflict of interest between human rights and business; issues such as children’s rights, health, or disability rights. Finally, Mumbai’s LHROs could simply ignore the potential reputational risks identified here, fundraise at will among local businesses and hope the public remains unaware or unconcerned.

To pursue any of these and other strategies, however, LHROs need to first begin a serious and systematic attempt to raise money locally, a strategy few have attempted, to date, in any great depth.

Notes

1. For background on Indian restrictions to foreign aid, see Jalali (2008). For the recent Indian crackdown, see Guha (2015), Patkar (2014), Bidwai (2015), The Editorial Board (2015), Najar (2015), Vyawahare (2014), and Mashru (2014).
2. LHRO leader interview with the first author on March 11, 2017 in Mumbai, India.
3. For a detailed discussion of Swaraj, see Dalton (2012).
4. LHRO leader interview with the first author on February 7, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
5. As per Section 135 of the 2013 Companies Act, companies of a certain must size give 2 percent of their average net income from the previous three years to corporate social responsibility initiatives (Ministry of Corporate Affairs 2013).
6. The best known funder of this sort is George Soros (Strom 2010), but HRW readily acknowledges reliance on other wealthy individuals and businesses. For HRW, the key ethical commitment is to never take *government* funding.
7. These broad categorizations are not mutually exclusive and are based on comments from several key informant interviews conducted with human rights experts in India between September and November 2010. These interviews were conducted in person, via Skype, or on the telephone by the first author. Individuals consulted included activists, lawyers, researchers, and practitioners who had extensive experience working in human rights organizations and/or researching, writing, and working in the field of human rights in Mumbai, India, and South Asia. All in person interviews were conducted in New Delhi and Mumbai. For more details, please contact authors.
8. The 2005 Right to Information Act provides for a timely response to citizen requests for government information; the 2009 Right to Education Act stipulates that children have a right to quality elementary education; and the 2013 National Food Security Act provides legal protection for the right to food. For more on the Right to Food Campaign, see Hertel (2014). In 2009, the Delhi High Court decriminalized homosexuality; however, the Supreme Court later overruled this ruling in December 2013.
9. In-person interview with a Mumbai-based key informant who has been involved in human rights activism in India for over 20 years and is the cofounder of two rights-based organizations and a human rights lawyer who practices in the High Court of Mumbai and the Supreme Court of India (November 11, 2010); for a detailed discussion of housing-related developments in Mumbai and as well as key housing rights groups in Mumbai, see Chapters 4 and 5 of Ramanath (2005); for a brief overview on housing-related developments, see N. Patel (2011).
10. For a historical overview of the early years of the RKS, see Goetz and Jenkins (2001).
11. We excluded all local branches of national or international organizations headquartered in other cities of India or other countries.
12. We asked LHRO respondents to take a look at our existing list of organizations to help identify organizations that were missing or changes required and made changes to the list after every five interviews, as there were not many new additions or subtractions.
13. See Pandya et al. (2016) for more details on the research methodology, characteristics of respondents and their organizations, and key findings from the interviews.
14. The median founding year of the entire sampling frame (57 LHROs) was 1992. Of the five LHROs founded in the 1970s, three had adopted rights-based approaches in the late 1990s and 2000s.
15. LHRO leader interview with the first author on January 31, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
16. LHRO leader interview with the first author on January 11, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
17. LHRO leader interview with the first author on March 18, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
18. LHRO leader interview with the first author on March 22, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
19. LHRO leader interview with the first author on March 18, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
20. LHRO leader interview with the first author on January 27, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
21. LHRO leader interview with the first author on January 28, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
22. LHRO leader interview with the first author on March 11, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
23. LHRO leader interview with the first author on March 22, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
24. LHRO leader interview with the first author on February 9, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
25. LHRO leader interview with the first author on January 28, 2011 in Mumbai, India.
26. In multistage sampling, respondents are selected in a sequential process from successively smaller geographical units
27. The others included domestic political institutions and actors, such as the Indian prime minister, Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian parliament), and Indian politicians, coercive state agencies, including the police and army, the general population, religious institutions, the Indian business sector, including banks and corporations, Indian NGOs in general, and international actors, including the multinational corporations, the United Nations, European Union, US government, international NGOs, and international HROs.
28. Although police sometimes have bad reputations among general populations, this does not seem to be the case in India. World Values Survey (WVS n.d.) data on India reveal similar levels of confidence in police and charitable/humanitarian organizations as our survey results for trust in police and Indian rights groups. According to the WVS online analysis tool, about 62 percent of respondents had “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of confidence in the police and 59.1 percent had “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of confidence in charitable and humanitarian

organizations in 2014. More research is required to further understand this dynamic. For a discussion of how the Indian police understand their own community role, see Wahl (2016).

29. All but one of the organization names that respondents gave did not correspond with actual human rights groups.
30. For earlier research on the cross-national determinants of trust in Local Human Rights Organizations, see Ron and Crow (2015).
31. *Trust in Local Human Rights Organizations* is an ordinal variable, which suggests use of the ologit technique. We report OLS here because its coefficients are easier to interpret and because ologit analysis reveals similar results.

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