

Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in international Politics

Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink

(Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), Chs. 1,3 (pp. 1-38, 79-120)

Summary:

The authors contend that there is indeed something new under the sun: transnational advocacy networks. These networks are essentially do-gooders from across the world, representing various relevant institutions of civil society, banding together to accomplish social good. Specific causes range from environment to human rights, the AIDS pandemic and health rights more generally, and use of Esperanto. (I'm serious about that last one.) In any case, the proliferation of these groups has been facilitated by recent ease of affordable travel and telecommunications, and they are having a significant effect on policy outcomes around the world. As of yet, however, they are little studied. They use the human rights networks in Latin America as a study in point.

Chapter 1: Transnational Advocacy Networks in International Politics: Introduction

World politics involves non-state actors, structured as networks. These actors come from a variety of sources: economic actors/firms; scientists and experts; activists. They are motivated by values, and band together to share resources designed to accomplish policy expression of those values.

What is a transnational advocacy network?

-- International networks of actors that share values, frequently exchange information, services and personnel; relationships among networks in international arena similar to those described in the literature on domestic activism.

Why and how have transnational advocacy networks emerged?

Technological improvements assist tremendously (email, cheap plane flights, etc)

Two particular types:

-- Boomerang pattern: State A blocks redress to organizations within it; they activate networks, whose members pressure their own states and (of relevant) a third-party organization, which in turn pressure State B (eg, cattle ranchers in Brazil's western Amazon).

-- Growth of international contact: Essentially, a modern expression of missionary and labor movement zeal, but applied in rights based language common to activists and NGO's.

How do transnational Advocacy Networks Work?

The TAN's wield influence as other political and social actors do, but rely heavily on persuasion and socialization, and pressure. They use four typologies (as defined by the authors):

Informational politics – the ability to quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it to where it will have most impact;

Symbolic politics – the ability to call upon symbols, actions, or stories that make sense of a situation for an audience that is frequently far away;

Leverage politics – the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence; and

Accountability politics – the effort to hold powerful actors to their previously stated policies or principles.

Under what conditions do advocacy networks have influence?

Their stages of influence are defined as follows:

1. Issue creation and agenda setting – generate attention to new issues.
2. Influence on discursive positions of states and io's – persuade people to sign onto international declarations, that sort of thing, no bite, but symbolic value.
3. Influence on institutional procedures – Making powerful institutions change their “standard operating procedures”
4. Influence on policy change in “target actors” – self-evident (and hard to do!)
5. Influence on state behavior. – Real change for your issue.

Issue characteristics – they are big ideas that involve right and wrong, around strong feelings and therefore allow networks to recruit volunteers and activists. Not all issues qualify, not all networks succeed, but something big and somewhat spiritual seems to be at the core. Save the children; preserve the earth; sanctity of living life. Issues everyone from Hobbes to Rawls would approve! Generally, things that actively cause harm to the most vulnerable are the most compelling...particularly when there is a clear party to blame. Then issues of equality and opportunity.

Actor characteristics – Network actors must be capable of transmitting the issue message for things to work. Dense networks are most likely to succeed, so actors' abilities to build network regularity and diffusion...and coverage...are key qualities necessary for success. Target actors must be vulnerable to either material incentives or target sanctions...or otherwise sensitive to pressures.

Thinking about transnational politics.

This work follows a long tradition in transnational politics, with a network edge. Examples include Keohane and Nye's work in the "new transnationalism" school, which lumps together relations among distinct power actors. This work refines the thinking by dividing the actors into categories by goals: instrumental goals (corporations and banks); shared causal ideas (scientific groups or epistemic communities); and shared principles or ideas (the matter at hand). These groups are quite diverse, with wide-ranging resource bases, and quite differing influence potential.

Studies in domestic politics also lend elucidation, particularly group formation and behavior. This analysis tends to be limited to issue areas in economic and government policy clusters, not principled issues.

The network literature in sociology is also relevant.

(Sara's note here: since the publication of this book, network theory has taken off with a bang. Beginning with a Strogatz, Watts article in Science in 1999, the new field of dynamic network theory took off. The work referred to in this book is based on static network descriptions, which has been substantially enriched in the past five years. Two excellent, rather non-technical books describe the current state of play: Albert Barabasi's book "Linked", and Duncan Watts' second book "Six Degrees: the Science of a Networked Age").

The authors then muse about the possibility of a truly global civil society, which most people who are not American seem to find rather appealing!

Chapter 3: Human Rights Networks

This chapter is an application of the aforeoutlined theory to the cases of Latin American human rights networks. It is useful to recall the five stages of network influence when tracing the story, so I'll recap.

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Emergence of human rights idea and the network

Now...following the outline, the first task was to establish that human rights concerns were appropriate and relevant in the international arena, something not assumed as late as the 1970's. Current networks include many members from NGO's, intergovernmental orgs, foundations, and others. But this all had to be created. The history is elaborated, but essentially boils down to leadership from a handful of well known (Woodrow Wilson, FDR, and HG Wells) and less well known (Alejandro Alvarez, Raphael Lemkin) supporters and believers. Following their mid-century leadership, significant movement forward was made.

In Latin America, international law was strongly supported, so as the discourse moved forward at the international level, Latin America followed suit, in name. This leads us to the second category of achievement: *influence on discursive positions*. As the ideas and fledgling networks in support of them spread, documents (notably the UN Charter) codifying the ideals also emerged. Advocacy networks became organized (Amnesty International was established in 1961), and a campaign to use the discursive positions to hold governments accountable ensued.

The network then solidified and expanded its efforts, bringing into play institutional actors. Players in notable roles were international NGO's, domestic NGO's, parts of international organizations, foundations and funders (notably the Ford Foundation; also Kennedy's vastly increased foreign aid budget in the early 1960's).

Networks and Governments

Most change in Latin American government policies have resulted from this human rights network, largely a response from pressure, often internationally-driven, at least at its final stages. The cycle described by the authors sounds very much like the boomerang pattern...(-- Boomerang pattern: State A blocks redress to organizations within it; they activate networks, whose members pressure their own states and (of relevant) a third-party organization, which in turn pressure State B).

The Carter Administration played an enormously important role in placing human rights at the center of many of its foreign policy decisions, particularly those involving Latin America. Items such as the annual US human rights report stayed and created influence in the press and on the ground...beyond the tenure of the Carters...other leadership fell away as Regan's relevant appointee, Eliot Abrams, pulled the US out of much of the human rights network and related dialogue. Still, from the perspective of Latin America, step three had been achieved, and *influence on institutional procedures* in the US and abroad was achieved.

The final two stages of changing policy and changing practice began during this time, and are described in more detail as two country case studies in Latin America, Mexico and Argentina, are contrasted. Essentially, the specifics are different, but in both cases a concluding principle...broadly applicable...is that spirited actors influence foreign governments to achieve social change in less-powerful domestic political settings. No real change on the human rights front was achieved in Mexico or in Argentina until outside actors influenced outside governments, who then brought to bear the power of the

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international community, to demand change from a now-isolated domestic leadership. To conclude with the concluding sentence of the chapter..."for human rights, as for the other issues in this book, the primary movers behind this form of principled international action are international networks."

Note: I'm embarrassed to say that I'm late finishing this section before class because I was in a meeting Monday and Tuesday all day trying to establish such a network focused on the plight of the children orphaned by HIV/AIDS.