Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics*

Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink

World politics at the end of the twentieth century involves, alongside states, many non-state actors who interact with each other, with states, and with international organizations. This article considers how these interactions are structured in networks, which are increasingly visible in international politics. Some involve economic actors and firms. Some are networks of scientists and experts whose professional ties and ideas underpin their efforts to influence policy (Haas, 1992). Others are networks of activists, distinguishable largely by the centrality of principled ideas or values in motivating their formation. We call these *transnational advocacy networks*.

Advocacy networks are significant transnationally, regionally and domestically. They may be key contributors to a convergence of social and cultural norms able to support processes of regional and international integration. By building new links among actors in civil societies, states and international organizations, they multiply the opportunities for dialogue and exchange. In issue areas such as the environment and human rights, they also make international resources available to new actors in domestic political and social struggles. By thus blurring the boundaries between a state's relations with its own nationals and the recourse both citizens and states have to the international system, advocacy networks are helping to transform the practice of national sovereignty.

Scholars have been slow to recognize either the rationality or the significance of activist networks. Motivated by values rather than by material concerns or professional norms, they fall outside our accustomed categories. Yet more than other kinds of transnational networks, advocacy networks often reach beyond policy change to advocate and instigate changes in the institutional and principled bases of international interactions. When they succeed, they are an important part of an explanation for changes in world politics. *A transnational advocacy network includes those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.*[1] Such networks are most prevalent in issue areas characterized by high value content and informational uncertainty, although the value-content of an issue is both a prerequisite and a result of network activity. At the core of the relationship is information exchange. What is novel in these networks is the ability of non-traditional international actors to mobilize information strategically to help create new issues and categories, and to persuade, pressurize, and gain leverage over much more powerful organizations and governments. Activists in networks

Margaret E. Keck is Associate Professor of Political Science, Johns Hopkins University, 338 Mergenthaler Hall, Baltimore, MD 21218, USA, email: mkeck@jhu.edu She is author of *The Workers' Party and Democratisation in Brazil* (1992) and *PT: A Lógica da Diferença* (in Portuguese) (1991). Kathryn Sikkink is Professor of Political Science, University of Minnesota, 1414 Social Science, 267 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA, email: Ksikkink@polisci.umn.edu She is author of *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina* (1991).

try not only to influence policy outcomes, but to transform the terms and nature of the debate. They are not always successful in their efforts, but they are increasingly important players in policy debates at the regional and international level.

Simultaneously principled and strategic actors, transnational advocacy networks 'frame' issues to make them comprehensible to target audiences, to attract attention and encourage action, and to 'fit' with favourable institutional venues. By framing, we mean 'conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action' (McAdam et al., 1996, p. 6). Network actors bring new ideas, norms and discourses into policy debates, and serve as sources of information and testimony. Norms 'describe collective expectations for the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity' (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 5; see also Klotz, 1995; Finnemore, 1996).

Shared norms often provide the foundation for more formal institutional processes of regional integration. In so far as networks promote norm convergence or harmonization at the regional and international levels, they are essential to the social and cultural aspects of integration. They also promote norm implementation, by pressuring target actors to adopt new policies, and by monitoring compliance with regional and international standards. As far as is possible, they seek to maximize their influence or leverage over the target of their actions. In doing this they contribute to changing the perceptions that both state and societal actors may have of their identities, interests and preferences, to transforming their discursive positions, and ultimately to changing procedures, policies and behaviour. We thus believe, with Finnemore, that 'States are embedded in dense networks of transnational and international social relations that shape their perceptions of the world and their role in that world. States are *socialized* to want certain things by the international society in which they and the people in them live' (Finnemore, 1996, p. 2).

Networks are *communicative structures*. To influence discourse, procedures and policy, transnational advocacy networks may become part of larger policy communities that group actors from a variety of institutional and value positions. Transnational advocacy networks may also be understood as political spaces, in which differently situated actors negotiate – formally or informally – the social, cultural and political meanings of their joint enterprises. In both of these ways, transnational networks can be key vehicles for the cultural and social negotiations underpinning processes of regional integration.

We refer to transnational networks (rather than coalitions, movements, or civil society) to evoke the structured and structuring dimension in the actions of these complex agents. By importing the network concept from sociology and applying it transnationally, we bridge the increasingly artificial divide between international relations and comparative politics. Moreover, the term 'network' is already used by the actors themselves; over the last two decades, individuals and organizations have consciously formed and named networks, developed and shared networking strategies and techniques, and assessed the advantages and limits of this kind of activity. Scholars have come late to the party.

Our theoretical apparatus draws upon sociological traditions that focus on complex interactions among actors, on the intersubjective construction of frames of meaning, and on the negotiation and malleability of identities and interests. These have been concerns of constructivists in international relations theory and of social movement theorists in comparative politics, and we draw from both traditions. The networks we study participate simultaneously in domestic and international politics, drawing upon a variety of resources, *as if they were part of an international society*. However, they use these resources strategically to affect a world of states and international organizations constructed by states. Both these dimensions are essential. Rationalists will recognize the language of incentives and constraints, strategies, institutions and rules, while constructivists and social constructionists will be more comfortable with our emphasis on norms, social relations and intersubjective understandings. We are convinced that both matter; whilst recognizing that goals and interests are not exogenously given, we can think about the strategic activity of actors in an intersubjectively structured political universe. The key to doing so is remembering that the social and political contexts within

which networks operate contain contested understandings as well as stable and shared ones. Network activists can operate strategically within the more stable universe of shared understandings at the same time as they try to reshape certain contested meanings.

Part of what is so elusive about networks is how they seem to embody elements of agent and structure simultaneously. Our approach must therefore be both structural and actor-centred. We address five main questions:

(1) What is a transnational advocacy network?
(2) Why and how do they emerge?
(3) How do they work?
(4) Under what conditions can they be effective – that is, when are they most likely to achieve their goals?
(5) What are the implications of network activities for the social and cultural processes of regional integration?

Although we had initially expected that transnational networks would function in quite different ways from domestic social movements, we found that many of the characteristic strategies, tactics and patterns of influence resembled those outlined in the literature on social movements. Organizations and individuals within advocacy networks are political entrepreneurs, mobilize resources like information and membership, and show a sophisticated awareness of the political opportunity structures within which they operate (Tarrow, 1994). Our emphasis on the role of values in networks is consistent with some arguments contained in the literature on 'new social movements' (Dalton et al., 1990). Most importantly, however, over the last decade social movement theory has increasingly focused on the interaction between social–structural conditions and action, on the social context of mobilization, and on the transformation of meanings among activists and among mass publics that make people believe they can have an impact on an issue.

What is a transnational advocacy network?

Networks are forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange. Organizational theorist Walter Powell calls them a third mode of economic organization, distinctly different from markets and hierarchy (the firm). 'Networks are "lighter on their feet" than hierarchy' and are 'particularly apt for circumstances in which there is a need for efficient, reliable information. . .', and 'for the exchange of commodities whose value is not easily measured' (Powell, 1990, pp. 295–6, 303–4). His insights into economic networks are extraordinarily suggestive for an understanding of political networks. Policy networks also form around issues where information plays a key role, and around issues where the value of the 'commodity' is not easily measured.

In spite of differences between the domestic and international realms, the network concept travels well because it stresses the fluid and open relations among committed and knowledgeable actors working in specialized issue areas. We call them advocacy networks because advocates plead the causes of others or defend a cause or proposition; they are stand-ins for persons or ideas. Advocacy captures what is unique about these transnational networks – they are organized to promote causes, principled ideas and norms, and often involve individuals advocating policy changes that cannot be easily linked to their 'interests'.

Some issue areas reproduce transnationally the webs of personal relationships that are crucial in the formation of domestic networks. Advocacy networks have been particularly important in value-laden debates over human rights, the environment, women, infant health, and indigenous peoples. These are all areas where through personal, professional and organizational contexts, large numbers of differently situated individuals became acquainted with each other over a considerable period, and developed similar world views. When the more visionary among them proposed strategies for political action around apparently intractable problems, the potential was transformed into an action network.

Major actors in advocacy networks may include the following:

(1) international and domestic NGOs, research and advocacy organizations;
(2) local social movements;
(3) foundations;

(4) the media;

(5) churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, intellectuals;

(6) parts of regional and international intergovernmental organizations;

(7) parts of the executive and/or parliamentary branches of governments.

Not all these will be present in each advocacy network. Initial research suggests, however, that international and domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a central role in most advocacy networks, usually initiating actions and pressuring more powerful actors to take positions. NGOs introduce new ideas, provide information, and lobby for policy changes.

Social scientists have barely addressed the political role of activist NGOs as *simultaneously* domestic and international actors. There is a literature on NGOs and networks in specific countries (Frühling, 1991; Scherer-Warren, 1993). Much of the existing literature on NGOs comes from development studies, and either ignores interactions with states or spends little time on political analysis (see, for example, Korten, 1990). Examining their role in advocacy networks helps both to distinguish NGOs from, and to see their connections with, social movements, state agencies and international organizations.

Groups in a network share values and frequently exchange information and services. The flow of information among actors in the network reveals a dense web of connections among these groups, both formal and informal. The movement of funds and services is especially notable between foundations and NGOs, but some NGOs provide services such as training for other NGOs in the same, and sometimes other, advocacy networks. Personnel also circulate within and among networks.

Relationships *among* networks within and between issue areas are similar to those that scholars of social movements have found in the case of domestic activism. Individuals and foundation funding have moved back and forth among them. Environmentalists and women's groups have looked at the history of human rights campaigns for models of effective international institution-building. Because of these interactions, refugee resettlement and indigenous peoples' rights are increasingly central

components of international environmental activity, and vice versa; mainstream human rights organizations have joined the campaign for women's rights. Some activists consider themselves part of an 'NGO community'. This convergence highlights important dimensions that these networks share: the centrality of values or principled ideas, the belief that individuals can make a difference, creative use of information, and the employment by non-governmental actors of sophisticated political strategies in targeting their campaigns. Besides sharing information, groups in networks create categories or frames within which to organize and *generate* information on which to base their campaigns. The ability to generate information quickly and accurately, and deploy it effectively, is their most valuable currency; it is also central to their identity. Core campaign organizers must ensure that individuals and organizations with access to necessary information are incorporated into the network; different ways of framing an issue may require quite different kinds of information. Thus, frame disputes can be a significant source of change within networks.

Why and how transnational advocacy networks have emerged?

The kinds of groups characteristic of advocacy networks are not new; some have existed since the nineteenth century campaign for the abolition of slavery. Nevertheless, their number, size, professionalism, and the density and complexity of their international linkages have grown dramatically in the last three decades, so that only recently can we speak of *transnational* advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

International networking is costly. Geographical distance, nationalism, the multiplicity of languages and cultures, and the costs of fax, telephone, mail, or air travel make the proliferation of international networks a puzzle that needs explanation. Under what conditions are networks possible and likely, and what triggers their emergence?

Transnational advocacy networks appear most likely to emerge around those issues where:

(1) channels between domestic groups and their governments are hampered or severed where such channels are ineffective for resolving a conflict, setting into motion the 'boomerang' pattern of influence characteristic of these networks;

(2) activists or 'political entrepreneurs' believe that networking will further their missions and campaigns, and actively promote them;

(3) international conferences and other forms of international contacts create arenas for forming and strengthening networks.

The boomerang pattern

It is no accident that 'rights' claims may be the prototypical language of advocacy networks. Governments are the primary 'guarantors' of rights, but also among their primary violators. When a government violates or refuses to recognize rights, individuals and domestic groups often have no recourse within domestic political or judicial arenas. They may seek international connections to express their concerns and even to protect their lives.

Many transnational advocacy networks link activists in developed countries with others in or from less developed countries. These kinds of linkages are most commonly intended to affect the behaviour of *states*. When the links between state and domestic actors are severed, domestic NGOs may directly seek international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside. This is the 'boomerang' pattern of influence characteristic of transnational networks where the target of their activity is to change a state's behaviour. This is most common in human rights campaigns. Similarly, indigenous rights campaigns, and environmental campaigns supporting the demands of local peoples for participation in development projects that would affect them, frequently involve this kind of triangulation. Where governments are unresponsive to groups whose claims may none the less resonate elsewhere, international contacts can 'amplify' the demands of domestic groups, pry open space for new issues, and then echo these demands back into the domestic arena. Needless to say, in such cases the use of a boomerang strategy is politically sensitive, and is subject to charges of foreign interference in domestic affairs.

Linkages are important for both sides. For the less powerful Third World actors, networks provide access, leverage and information (and often money) they could not expect to have on their own. For northern groups, they make credible the assertion that they are struggling with, and not only 'for', their southern partners. Not surprisingly, such relationships can produce considerable tensions. It is not uncommon to see reproduced internally the power relations that the networks are trying to overcome. Increasingly, network members are forced to address this problem.

Just as injustice and oppression may not produce movements or revolutions by themselves, claims around issues amenable to international action need not produce transnational networks. Activists are 'people who care enough about some issue that they are prepared to incur significant costs and act to achieve their goals' (Oliver and Marwell, 1992, p. 252). They form networks when they believe it will further their organizational missions – by sharing information, attaining greater visibility, gaining access to different publics, multiplying channels of institutional access, and so forth.

Networks are normally formed around particular campaigns or claims. Networks breed networks; as networking becomes a repertoire of action that is diffused transnationally, each effort to network internationally is less difficult than the one before. Over time, in these issue areas, participation in transnational networks has become an essential component of the collective identities of the activists involved. The political entrepreneurs who become the core networkers for a new campaign have often gained experience in earlier ones.

Opportunities for network activities have increased over the last two decades, in part through the efforts of the pioneers among them. Network activists have been creative in finding new venues in which to pursue claims – a process we discuss in the next section. The proliferation of international organizations and conferences has provided foci for the contacts. Cheaper air travel and new electronic and communication technologies speed information flows and simplify personal contact among them.

Underlying the trends discussed here, however, is a broader cultural shift. The new net-

Greenpeace in action. Guelbiz/Action Press

works depended on creating a new kind of global public (or civil society), which grew as a cultural legacy of the 1960s. The activism that swept western Europe, the United States, and many parts of the Third World during that decade contributed to this shift, alongside the vastly increased opportunities for international contact.

Obviously, internationalism was not invented in the 1960s. Several long-standing ethical traditions have justified actions by individuals or groups outside the borders of their own state. Broadly speaking, we could designate these as religious beliefs, the solidarity traditions of labour and the left, and liberal internationalism. While many activists working in advocacy networks are from one of these traditions, they no longer tend to define themselves in terms of these traditions or the organizations that carried them. This is most true for activists on the left, for whom the decline of socialist organizations capped a growing disillusionment with much of the left's refusal to address seriously the concerns of women, the environment,

and human rights violations in eastern bloc countries.

Advocacy networks in the north often function in a cultural milieu of internationalism that is generally optimistic about the promise and possibilities of international networking. For network members in developing countries, however, justifying external intervention or pressure in domestic affairs is a much trickier business, except when lives are at stake. Linkages with northern networks require high levels of trust, because arguments justifying intervention on ethical grounds often sound too much like the 'civilizing' discourse of colonial powers, and can work against the goals they espouse by producing a nationalist backlash.

How do transnational advocacy networks work?

Transnational networks seek influence in many of the same ways that other political groups or

social movements do, but because they are not powerful in the traditional sense of the word, they must use the power of their information, ideas and strategies to alter the information and value context within which states make policies. Although much of what networks do might be considered persuasion, the term is insufficiently precise to be of much theoretical use. We have developed a more nuanced typology of the kinds of tactics that networks use. These include:

(a) *information politics,* or the ability to move politically usable information quickly and credibly to where it will have the most impact;

(b) *symbolic politics,* or the ability to call upon symbols, actions or stories that make sense of a situation or claim for an audience that is frequently far away (see also Brysk, 1994, 1995);

(c) *leverage politics*, or the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence; and

(d) *accountability politics,* or the effort to oblige more powerful actors to act on vaguer policies or principles they formally endorsed.

The construction of cognitive frames is an essential component of transnational networks' political strategies. David Snow has called this strategic activity *frame alignment* – 'by rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective' (Snow et al., 1986). *Frame resonance* concerns the relationship between an organization's interpretive work and its ability to influence broader public understandings. The latter involves both the frame's internal coherence and its fit with a broader political culture (Snow and Benford, 1988). In recent work, Snow and Benford (1992) and Tarrow (1992), in turn, have given frame resonance a historical dimension by joining it to Tarrow's notion of protest cycles. Struggles over meaning and the creation of new frames of meaning occur early in a protest cycle, but over time, 'a given collective action frame becomes part of the political culture – which is to say, part of the reservoir of symbols from which future movement entrepreneurs can choose' (Tarrow, 1992, p. 197).

Network members actively seek ways to bring issues to the public agenda, both by framing them in innovative ways and by seeking hospitable venues. Sometimes they create issues by framing old problems in new ways; occasionally they help to transform other actors' understandings of their identities and their interests. Land-use rights in the Amazon, for example, took on an entirely different character and gained quite different allies when viewed in a deforestation frame than in either social justice or regional development frames.

Transnational networks normally involve a small number of activists in a given campaign or advocacy role. The kinds of pressure and agenda politics in which they engage rarely involve mass mobilization, except at key moments, although the peoples whose cause they espouse may engage in mass protest (for example, the expelled population in the Narmada Dam case). Boycott strategies are a partial exception. Instead, network activists engage in what Baumgartner and Jones (1991), borrowing from law, call *venue shopping*: 'This strategy relies less on mass mobilisation and more on the dual strategy of the presentation of an image and the search for a more receptive political venue' (p. 1050). The recent coupling of indigenous rights and environmental struggles is a good example of a strategic venue shift by *indigenista* activists, who found the environmental arena more receptive to their claims than had been human rights venues.

Information politics

Information binds network members together and is essential for network effectiveness. Many information exchanges are informal – through telephone calls, e-mail and fax communications, and the circulation of small newsletters, pamphlets and bulletins. They provide information that would not otherwise be available, from sources that might not otherwise be heard, and make it comprehensible and useful to activists and publics who may be geographically and/or socially distant.

Non-state actors gain influence by serving as alternative sources of information. Information flows in advocacy networks provide not only facts, but also *testimonies* – stories told by people whose lives have been affected.

Moreover, they interpret facts and testimony; activist groups frame issues simply, in terms of right and wrong, because their purpose is to *persuade* people and stimulate them to take action.

How does this process of persuasion occur? An effective frame must show that a given state of affairs is neither natural nor accidental, identify the responsible party or parties, and propose credible solutions. This requires clear, powerful messages that appeal to shared principles, and which often have more impact on state policy than the advice of technical experts. An important part of the political struggle over information is whether an issue is defined primarily as technical, subject to consideration by 'qualified' experts, or as something that concerns a much broader global constituency.

Even as we highlight the importance of testimony, however, we have to recognize the mediations involved. The process by which testimony is discovered and presented normally involves several layers of prior translation. Transnational actors may identify what kinds of testimony would be valuable, then ask an NGO in the area to seek out people who could tell those stories. They may filter through expatriates, through travelling scholars, through the media. There is frequently a huge gap between the story's telling and its retelling – in sociocultural context, in instrumental meaning, and even in language. Local people, in other words, sometimes lose control over their stories in a transnational campaign.

Non-governmental networks have helped to legitimize the use of testimonial information along with technical and statistical information. Linkage of the two is crucial: without the individual cases, activists cannot motivate people to seek to change policies. Increasingly, international campaigns by networks take this two-level approach to information. In the 1980s even Greenpeace, which initially had eschewed rigorous research in favour of splashy media events, began to pay more attention to getting the facts right. While testimony does not avoid the need to manage technical information, it helps to make the need for action more real for ordinary citizens.

A dense web of north–south exchange, aided by computer and fax communication, means that governments can no longer mono-polize information flows as they could a mere half-decade ago. These technologies have had an enormous impact on moving information to and from Third World countries, where mail services are often both slow and precarious. We should note, however, that this gives special advantages to organizations that have access to such technologies.

The central role of information in all these issues helps to explain the drive to create networks. Information in these issue areas is both essential and dispersed. Non-governmental actors depend upon their access to information to help make them legitimate players. Contact with like-minded groups at home and abroad provides access to information necessary to their work, broadens their legitimacy, and helps to mobilize information around particular policy targets. Most NGOs cannot afford to maintain staff in a variety of countries. In exceptional cases, they send staff members on investigation missions, but this is not practical for keeping informed on routine developments. Forging links with local organizations allows groups to receive and monitor information from many countries at low cost. Local groups, in turn, depend on international contacts to get their information out, and to help to protect them in their work.

The media are essential partners in network information politics. To reach a broader audience, networks strive to attract press attention. Sympathetic journalists may become part of the network, but more often network activists cultivate a reputation for credibility with the press, and package their information in a timely and dramatic way to draw press attention.

Symbolic politics

Activists frame issues by identifying and providing convincing explanations for powerful symbolic events, which in turn become catalysts for the growth of networks. Symbolic interpretation is part of the process of persuasion by which networks create awareness and expand the constituency. Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchu, during the International Year of Indigenous People, heightened public awareness of the situation of indigenous peoples in the Americas. The ability of the indigenous people's movement to use 1992, the

500th anniversary of the voyage of Columbus to the Americas, to raise a host of indigenous issues revealed the ability of networks to use symbolic events to reshape understandings (Brysk, 1994).

The coup in Chile played this kind of catalytic role for the human rights community. Often it is not one event, but the juxtaposition of disparate events that makes people change their minds and take action. For many people in the US, it was the juxtaposition of the coup in Chile, the war in Vietnam, Watergate, and civil rights that gave birth to the human rights movement. Likewise, the juxtaposition of the hot summer of 1988 in the US with dramatic footage of the Brazilian rainforest burning may have convinced many people that global warming and tropical deforestation were serious and linked issues. The assassination of Chico Mendes at the end of that year crystallized the belief that something was profoundly wrong in the Amazon.

Leverage politics

Activists in advocacy networks are concerned with political effectiveness. Their definition of effectiveness often involves some policy change by 'target actors' which might be governments, but might also be international financial institutions like the World Bank, or private actors like transnational corporations. In order to bring about policy change, networks need to both persuade and pressurize more powerful actors. To gain influence the networks seek *leverage* – a word that appears often in the discourse of advocacy organizations – over more powerful actors. By exerting leverage over more powerful institutions, weak groups gain influence far beyond their ability to influence state practices directly. Identifying points of leverage is a crucial strategic step in network campaigns. We discuss two kinds of leverage: material leverage and moral leverage.

Material leverage usually takes the form of some kind of issue-linkage, normally involving money or goods (but potentially also including votes in international organizations, prestigious offices, or other benefits). The human rights issue became negotiable because other governments or financial institutions connected human rights practices to the cut-off of military and economic aid, or to worsening bilateral diplomatic relations. Human rights groups obtained leverage by providing US and European policy-makers with information that persuaded them to cut off military and economic aid. To make the issue negotiable, NGOs first had to raise its profile or salience, using information and symbolic politics. Then more powerful members of the network had to link cooperation to something else of value: money, trade or prestige. Similarly, in the environmentalists' multilateral bank campaign, linkage – of environmental protection with access to loans – was very powerful.

Moral leverage involves what some commentators have called the 'mobilisation of shame', where the behaviour of target actors is held up to the bright light of international scrutiny. Where states place a high value on international prestige, this can be effective. In the baby-food campaign, network activists used moral leverage to convince states to vote in favour of the WHO/UNICEF Codes of Conduct. As a result, even the Netherlands and Switzerland, both major exporters of infant formula, voted in favour of the code.

Although NGO influence often depends on securing powerful allies, making those links still depends on their ability to mobilize the solidarity of their members, or of public opinion via the media. In democracies, the potential to influence votes gives large membership organizations an advantage in lobbying for policy change; environmental organizations, several of whose memberships number in the millions, are more likely to have this added clout than are human rights organizations.

Accountability politics

Networks devote considerable energy to convincing governments and other actors to change their positions on issues. This is often dismissed as inconsequential change, since talk is cheap – governments change discursive positions hoping to divert network and public attention. Network activists, however, try to make such statements into opportunities for accountability politics. Once a government has publicly committed itself to a principle – for example, in favour of human rights or democracy – networks can use those positions, and their command of infor-

mation, to expose the distance between discourse and practice. This is embarrassing to many governments, who may try to save face by closing the distance.

Under what conditions do advocacy networks have influence?

To assess the influence of advocacy networks we must look at goal achievement at several different levels. We identify the following types or stages of network influence:

(1) issue creation and attention/agenda setting;
(2) influence on discursive positions of states and regional and international organizations;
(3) influence on institutional procedures;
(4) influence on policy change in 'target actors' which may be states, international or regional organizations, or private actors like the Nestlé corporation;
(5) influence on state behaviour.

Networks generate attention to new issues and help to set agendas when they provoke media attention, debates, hearings and meetings on issues that previously had not been a matter of public debate. Because values are the essence of advocacy networks, this stage of influence may require a modification of the 'value context' in which policy debates take place. The theme years and decades of the United Nations, such as International Women's Decade and the Year of Indigenous People, were international events promoted by networks that heightened awareness of issues.

Networks influence discursive positions when they help to persuade states and international organizations to support international declarations or change stated domestic policy positions. The role that environmental networks played in shaping state positions and conference declarations at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro is an example of this kind of impact. They may also pressurize states to make more binding commitments by signing conventions and codes of conduct.

At a more concrete level, the network has influence if it leads to changes in policies, not only of the target states, but also of other states

and/or international institutions. These changes are easier to see, but their causes can be elusive. We can speak of network impact on policy change where human rights networks have pressured successfully for cut-offs of military aid to repressive regimes, where repressive practices diminish because of pressure, or even where human rights activity affects regime change or stability. We must take care to distinguish between policy change and change in behaviour; official policies may predict nothing about how actors behave in reality.

We speak of stages of impact, and not merely types of impact, because we believe that increased attention and changes in discursive positions make governments more vulnerable to the claims these networks raise. This is not always true, of course – discursive changes can also have a powerfully divisive effect on networks, splitting insiders from outsiders, reformers from radicals. None the less, a government that claims to be protecting indigenous areas or ecological reserves is more vulnerable to charges that such areas are endangered than one that makes no such claim. Then, the effort is no longer to make governments change their position, but to hold them to their word. Meaningful policy and behavioural change is thus more likely when the first three types or stages of impact have occurred.

Both *issue characteristics* and *actor characteristics* are important parts of our explanation of how networks affect political outcomes and the conditions under which networks can be effective. Issue characteristics like salience and resonance within existing national or institutional agendas can tell us something about where networks are likely to be able to insert new ideas and discourse into policy debates. Success in influencing policy depends on the strength and density of the network, and its ability to achieve leverage.

As we look at the issues around which transnational advocacy networks have organized most effectively, we find two characteristic issues that appear most frequently:

(1) those involving bodily harm to vulnerable individuals, especially when there is a short and clear causal chain (or story) about who bears responsibility;
(2) issues involving *legal* equality of opportunity.

The first responds to a normative logic, and the second to a judicial and institutional one.

Issues involving physical harm to vulnerable or innocent individuals appear more likely to resonate transnationally. Of course, this alone does not ensure the success of the campaign, but is particularly compelling. Nor is it straightforward to determine what constitutes bodily harm, and who is vulnerable or innocent. Both issues of 'harm' and 'innocence' or vulnerability are highly interpretive and contested. Nevertheless, we argue that issues involving bodily harm to populations perceived as vulnerable or innocent are more likely to lead to effective transnational campaigns than other kinds of issues. This helps to explain why it has been easier to work on torture or disappearance than some other human rights issues, and why it has been easier to protest against torture of political prisoners than against torture of common criminals or to abolish capital punishment. It is also useful for understanding that those environmental campaigns that have had the greatest transnational effect have been those that stress the connection between protecting environments *and* the (often vulnerable) people who live in those environments. We also argue, following Deborah Stone (1989), that in order to campaign on an issue it must be converted into a 'causal story' – establishing who bears responsibility or guilt. But in addition to the need for a causal story, we argue that the causal chain within that story needs to be sufficiently short and clear to make a convincing case about responsibility or guilt.

The second issue around which transnational campaigns appear to have greater effectiveness is that of greater legal equality of opportunity. Notice that we stress *legal* equality of *opportunity*, not of outcome. One of the most successful international campaigns was the anti-apartheid campaign. What made apartheid such a clear target was the legal denial of the most basic aspects of equality of opportunity.

Transnational networks and regional integration

Many scholars now recognize that the state no longer has a monopoly over public affairs and are seeking ways to describe the sphere of inter-national interactions under a variety of names: transnational relations, international civil society, and global civil society (Lipschutz, 1992; Peterson, 1992). In their views, states no longer look unitary from the outside. Increasingly dense interactions among individuals, groups, actors from states and regional and international institutions appear to involve much more than re-presenting interests on a world stage.

Recent empirical work in sociology has gone a long way towards demonstrating the extent of changes 'above' and 'below' the state. The world polity theory associated with John Meyer, John Boli, George Thomas and their colleagues, conceives of an international society in a radically different way. For these scholars, it is the area of diffusion of world culture – a process that itself constitutes the characteristics of states (Thomas et al., 1987; Boli and Thomas, in press). The vehicles for its diffusion become global intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, but neither the sources of norms nor the processes through which global cultural norms evolve are adequately specified (Finnemore, 1996). Proponents of world polity theory present international organizations and NGOs as 'enactors' of some basic cultural principles of the world culture: universalism, individualism, rational voluntaristic authority, human purposes, and world citizenship. There is thus no meaningful distinction between those espousing norms that reinforce existing institutional power relationships, and those that challenge them.

We argue that different transnational actors have profoundly divergent purposes and goals. To understand how change occurs in the world polity we have to unpack the different categories of transnational actors, and understand the quite different logic and process in these different categories. The logic of transnational advocacy networks, which are often in conflict with states over basic principles, is quite different from the logic of other transnational actors who provide symbols or services or models for states. In essence, world polity theorists eliminate the struggles over power and meaning that for us are central to normative change.

Our research suggests that many transnational networks have been sites of cultural and political negotiation rather than mere

enactors of dominant Western norms. Western human rights norms have indeed been the defining framework for many networks, but how these norms are articulated is transformed in the process of network activity. For example, issues of indigenous rights and cultural survival have been at the forefront of modern network activity, and yet they run counter to the cultural model put forward by the world polity theorists.

In other words, as modern anthropologists realize, culture is not a totalizing influence, but a field that is constantly changing. Certain discourses – like that of human rights – provide a language for negotiation. Within this language certain moves are privileged over others; human rights is a very disciplining discourse. But it is also a permissive discourse that allows different groups within the network to renegotiate meanings. The success of the campaign for women's rights as human rights reveals the possibilities

within the discourse of human rights. We believe that studying networks is extraordinarily valuable for tracking and ultimately theorizing about the emergence of shared norms and cultural meanings underpinning processes of regional and international integration.

Network theory can thus provide an explanation for transnational change, a model that is not just one of 'diffusion' of liberal institutions and practices, but one through which the preferences and identities of actors engaged in transnational society are sometimes mutually transformed through their interactions with each other. Because networks are voluntary and horizontal, actors participate in them to the degree that they perceive mutual learning, respect and benefits. Modern networks are not conveyor belts of liberal ideals, but vehicles for communicative and political exchange, with the potential for mutual transformation of participants.

Notes

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1. We developed this definition based on a discussion in Mitchell (1973, p. 23).

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