

Keck and Sikkink – Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics

Chapter 1 – “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International Politics: Introduction”

Transnational advocacy networks (TANs) are networks of activists. These networks are formed on the basis of shared principled ideas and values. Such networks are most prevalent in issue areas with both high informational uncertainty and that particularly implicate deeply held values. Advocacy is often on behalf of others (torture victims, oppressed women, etc.) and such often do not conform to the rationalist understanding of self-interest. Networks mobilize information and insert new ideas, norms and values into policy discussions in an effort to pressure governments and international organizations. Their most valuable asset is their ability to mobilize information.

The authors employ both constructivist and rationalist theoretical assumptions. Identities and interests are not fixed and TANs are forums for the intersubjective evolution of meanings. Networks simultaneously operate as rational utility-maximizing actors and as actors trying to contest and reshape meanings. The authors' methodology is inductive as they examine a number of TANs across issues and cultures. They analyze specific TANs' campaigns with a focus on the relationships between network actors, the resources they mobilize, and the influence of institutional structure. Individual actors are not unconsciously promoting a specific agenda. Rather they are aware of their goals and are constantly reflecting on how to best further those goals.

The proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their organization into transnational networks merits further scrutiny because it is costly and logistically difficult to establish and maintain an international network. Networks are formed and reinforced by the “boomerang pattern” in which domestic NGOs are unable to influence their governments so they form coalitions with other NGOs to generate pressure on the second state's governments so that eventually the original state will be pressured externally. This pattern will only occur when activists believe that a transnational approach will be of use in achieving their goals. There are four types of tactics used by advocacy networks:

- Information politics – the generation of information and its deployment where it will be most influential
- Symbolic politics – calling upon symbols, actions, and stories that help convince distant audiences
- Leverage politics – utilization of the most powerful, influential actors in a network
- Accountability politics- measures to hold leaders accountable for previous statements or actions.

Much of the TANs persuasive efforts are focused on the construction of cognitive frames which place issues in a context to imbue current efforts with a sense of historical continuity.

Chapter 3 – “Human Rights Advocacy Networks in Latin America”

Origins of Human Rights Movement

Just prior to and during WWII there was a surge in interest in universal human rights. The discussion on human rights began with emergence of Wilsonian internationalism and was further developed by lawyers in Europe and Latin America. Additional interest was generated by the movement among workers for international solidarity and their disillusionment with the failure of democratic institutions to prevent the rise of fascism. In the drafting of the UN Charter of Human Rights NGOs played a critical role in advocating strong human rights provisions.

In Latin America there had always been especially strong support for international law because it was seen as a bulwark against American intervention. In the drafting of the UN Charter several Latin American delegations expressed strong support for protection of human rights. Prior to the 1970s the tension between nonintervention and human rights had always been resolved in favor of the former. As support for human rights grew, Latin American leaders found it difficult to openly voice opposition to principles their countries had previously strongly supported.

International NGOs

Amnesty International (AI) was formed in the 1960s and was the first human rights NGO to gain international attention. This is due in large part to its successful publicity campaigns. In the 1970s interest in human rights issues grew with increasing membership in NGOs both in the developed and less developed world. AI brought worldwide attention to specific types of human rights abuses in Latin America.

Domestic NGOs

The growth of domestic human rights NGOs formed alliances and partnerships with NGOs and scientific experts in other countries. Through these linkages domestic NGOs received the help they needed to definitively prove human rights violations..

International Organizations

Also in the 1970s international organizations took up the mantle of human rights protection. Under pressure from NGOs UN human rights organs became more active. They were often dependent on NGOs for information about human rights abuses. As the UN became more active there was attempts by Latin American countries to remove resources and otherwise undercut the activities of IOs.

Private Foundations and Funders

The Ford Foundation contributed to the development of human rights norms by funding the activities of politically persecuted intellectuals. Additionally funding was provided by the development agencies of the US, Canada, and Europe.

Keck and Sikkink highlight the importance of networks in combination with national governments. In the Latin American case NGOs coordinated there pressure of western

governments at key moments so as to put pressure on these western countries to in turn pressure and/or punish Latin American states with poor human rights records. In the case of Argentina NGOs publicized the military junta's human rights violations at the time when the US Congress was deciding the future of trade relations with Argentina. The NGO pressure was successful: the US placed an arms embargo on Argentina and convened a group in the UN to further examine human rights violations. By contrast in Mexico, there was little attention to human rights violations committed by the ruling political party, the PRI. NGOs were focused on the more severe human rights abuses in Central and South America. Starting in 1988 there was a rise in the activity of domestic NGOs that paralleled the rise of a vocal political opposition. These NGOs placed pressure on the ruling party to curb human rights abuses. As Mexico sought a higher profile relationship with the US (i.e. negotiation of NAFTA) the Mexican government was forced to improve its human rights record lest it hinder its international position.