

Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics, Chapter 1
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Keck and Sikkink seek to investigate the nongovernmental actors in international politics which seek to change the behavior of states and organizations. Under-researched and often dismissed by researchers employing a Realist approach to IR, these networks work as actors who are simultaneously both domestic and international. The authors point out that “view of sovereignty in international relations focuses almost exclusively on the understandings and practices of states as the sole determinants of sovereignty” (p. 35). Rejecting both the Realist view of state sovereignty and the “separation common in our discipline between international relations and comparative politics” (p. 4) the authors draw from both political science and sociology to answer the following questions: “1) What is a transnational network? 2) How and why do they emerge? 3) How do advocacy networks work? 4) Under what conditions can they be effective?” (p. 5)

Defining a network as “a form of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange” (p. 8), the authors label them “advocacy networks” because “advocates plead the cause of others or defend a cause or proposition” (ibid.). Among the members of these networks are religious organizations, trade unions, branches of government, local social movements, and the media.

Advocacy networks emerged in the 19th century campaigns for the abolition of slavery, but have more recently increased in number due to decreasing travel and information transaction costs. Networks of this sort are most likely “to emerge around those issues where channels between domestic groups and their government are blocked or hampered or where such channels are ineffective for resolving a conflict” (p. 12). Keck and Sikkink argue that a “boomerang” pattern emerges when states block NGO access to policy areas; these NGOs provide information for or pressure on other states or intergovernmental organizations, which in turn apply pressure on the original state. The boomerang effect, where a domestic group uses international allies to change its own governments’ practices, the authors claim, “undermine[s] absolute claims to [state] sovereignty” (p. 36). These has proved to be an effective method of changing governmental policies, especially in areas involving human rights or environmental issues.

Transnational advocacy networks work by “bringing pressure, arm twisting, encouraging sanctions, and shaming” (p. 16), i.e. through persuasion and socialization. Among the tactics they employ are: information politics, quickly generating and disseminating politically usable information; symbolic politics, creating symbols for an audience often far away; leverage politics, using powerful actors where weaker actors are unable to have an effect; accountability politics, or holding powerful actors to previously made promises (ibid.)

Advocacy networks have an influence where the network is “dense, with many actors, strong connections between groups in the network, and reliable information flows” (p. 28). Linking issues to bodily harm of vulnerable individuals, or legal equality of opportunity, is also an effective site for network influence.