

Margaret E. Keck & Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), Chapter 1.

Keck & Sikkink (K&S) examine the role of transnational advocacy networks, i.e. non-state actors whose interactions with states, international organizations, and other actors affect world politics. These advocacy networks operate at the domestic and international level, occupying an area that is hard to define in conventional international relations terms. As a consequence, they have received little attention from students of international relations. K&S find that these networks have certain fundamental characteristics in common, such as “the centrality of values or principled ideas, the belief that individuals can make a difference, the creative use of information, and the employment of nongovernmental actors or sophisticated political strategies in targeting their campaigns”. Thus, for example, they do not attract the attention of Realists, because they are hard to classify in terms of power. Nevertheless, K&S argue that when these networks succeed in their endeavors, they are an important part of the explanation of what went on.

Transnational advocacy networks operate at a number of levels. Their goal is “to change the behavior of states and international organizations”. In the process, they process and provide information about the issue at stake, push for changes in policy, bring expertise into the relevant debate, and thus transform the prevalent understandings of a certain issue. These networks are “characterized by voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange”, and have proliferate as a result of the increased interconnectedness brought about by the evolution of telecommunications and the expansion of travel.

Transnational advocacy networks emerge in areas in which local groups have no or limited recourse to their government or to international organizations for the solution of a problem. In these cases, K&S identify what they describe as a “boomerang pattern”, that is, the emergence of pressure in situations in which NGOs provide information about the problem to other, foreign NGOs, which in turn notify their governments and relevant international organizations, so that those can apply pressure on the country in which the problem exists. According to K&S, this process is particularly interesting and important because it is effective and because it goes against the more usual ways of thinking about international processes (i.e. explanations according absolute primacy to sovereignty). Although issues such as the environment and development are important for such networks, the majority of the activity concerns rights, which is not surprising given the fact that in most cases involving rights the problem begins with local authorities, and effective solutions must come more often than not from the outside.

According to K&S, transnational advocacy networks work by using 1) information politics, or the ability to generate and use relevant information effectively, 2) symbolic politics, or the ability to invoke such symbols as will bring the issue to life for audiences that are far away, 3) leverage politics, or the ability to call upon powerful

actors, and 4) accountability politics, or the effort to hold actors to their promises. K&S find that such networks influence the situation mainly in five ways: 1) issue creation and agenda setting, 2) discursive positions of states and international organizations, 3) institutional procedures, 4) policy change in states, organizations, or corporations, and 5) state behavior. K&S argue that by concentrating on issue and actor characteristics (such as issue resonance, network density, and target vulnerability) they will be able to identify those areas in which such networks will be likely to emerge and have an influence. Based on the motivation of networks, K&S distinguish their transnational advocacy networks, which are primarily motivated by shared principled ideas or values from networks with instrumental goals (e.g. those targeting corporations) and those motivated by shared causal ideas (e.g. scientific groups).

According to K&S, this category poses a challenge to those theories of international relations that view the state as a unitary actor. Moreover, they argue that the concept of the advocacy network cannot be subsumed under the notions of transnational social movements or global civil society, because these tend to “ignore the issues of agency and political opportunity that [K&S] find central for understanding the evolution of new international institutions and relationships”.