

Book review

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Margaret E. Keck, Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998, 228 pp., £ 11.95 pbk.).

In recent years, an increasing amount of empirical research and theorizing in international relations has revived the debate on transnational relations. Although transnational relations have been successfully brought back in, many empirical and theoretical blind spots remain, especially as regards the factors contributing to the relative failure or success of non-state actor attempts to change state behaviour and thus policy outcomes in specific issue-areas. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink aim to fill some of these gaps by focusing on the role of transnational advocacy networks formed by *Activists beyond Borders*.

The authors define transnational advocacy networks as communicative structures whose members are primarily motivated 'by shared principled ideas or values' (p. 30), engaging in the 'voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal exchange of information and services' (p. 200). It is the organization around shared values that distinguishes transnational advocacy networks from other transnational networks such as corporations and banks, which pursue purely instrumental goals, and epistemic communities motivated primarily by shared causal ideas. Domestic and international NGOs play central roles in all transnational advocacy networks which may also include local social movements, the media, intellectuals, parts of regional and international intergovernmental organizations and parts of the executive and/or parliamentary branches of governments (p. 9).

In their conceptual introduction, historical overview of precursors to modern networks and three case studies (human rights advocacy networks in Latin America, environmental advocacy

networks, transnational networks on violence against women), the authors seek to account for the origins, workings and conditions of effective advocacy networks. The 1960s cultural shift favouring international activism and better, cheaper and more readily available means of communication and transportation facilitated the emergence of transnational advocacy networks. Such networks 'carry and re-frame ideas, insert them in policy debates, pressure for regime formation, and enforce existing international norms and rules, at the same time that they try to influence particular domestic political issues' (p. 199). Advocacy networks are not powerful in the traditional sense but instead develop innovative strategies and techniques to make a difference. Keck and Sikkink identify four clusters of strategies and techniques: Information politics (gathering and providing information, dramatizing facts by using testimonies), symbolic politics (use of symbolic events and conferences to publicize issues), leverage politics (linking issues of concern to money, trade or prestige and persuading more powerful actors such as the World Bank to exert pressure) and accountability politics (reminding governments or institutions of living up to previously endorsed principles). The case studies (in particular the ones on human rights advocacy networks in Argentina and Mexico) show that many activities of advocacy networks follow the 'boomerang pattern' (p. 13): State A blocks redress to organizations within it; they activate networks, whose members pressure their own state and (if relevant) a third-party organization, which in turn pressure State A.

According to Keck and Sikkink, the key determining factors for the success of transnational advocacy networks are the strength and density of the networks, the vulnerability of the target state or organization, domestic structures (the nature of domestic institutions and society) and the nature of the relevant issue. The case studies show that issues involving 'bodily

harm to vulnerable individuals and legal equality of opportunity' are most conducive to successful mobilization (p. 204).

Activists beyond Borders should be regarded as a pioneer work in the field of transnational activist networks and a major contribution to the literature on transnational relations. By drawing on a broad range of comparative work on social movements, Keck and Sikkink manage to bridge the often deplored but persistent gap between domestic and international politics. They also make important contributions to ongoing debates in international relations theory, for example by demonstrating the importance of norms and ideas for change in the (inter)national arena. The international system, Keck and Sikkink argue, is 'made up not only of states engaged in self-help or even rule-governed behavior, but of dense webs of interactions and interrelations among citizens of different states which both reflect and help sustain shared values, beliefs and projects' (p. 213). Avoiding the premature optimism of 'world polity' theory (John Boli/George Thomas), they opt for a cautious extension of the notion of 'international society' from a society of states to an emerging, yet highly fragmented transnational civil society.

Effective advocacy networks, Keck and Sikkink assert, contribute to a transformed understanding of national interest in their target state. The underlying process - described as 'socialization' - remains undertheorized. Role theories and theories of learning might be helpful in shedding further light on this process.

As with many pioneer works, the authors inevitably could not address many issues inviting criticism. Although the case studies offer a multitude of detailed and original insights, they at times lack sufficient analytical rigour necessary to fully integrate the empirical and conceptual chapters. For example, the use of symbolic politics and framing remains underexplored in the chapter on human rights advocacy networks. Moreover, while explaining the

importance of norms and ideas, Keck and Sikkink hardly discuss the origins of the norms themselves. A more open engagement with potential critics who might regard transnational advocacy networks as mere instruments of power politics would also improve the overall analytical coherence of the study. Nonetheless, this work is a benchmark and an obvious starting point for further research on advocacy networks and transnational relations.

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