Non-state Actors and Global Governance Literature Review

By Rei Tang
States are not the only actors in global governance. “Global governors are actors who exercise power across borders with some degree of legitimacy and continuity for purposes of affecting policy in an issue area. Governors thus: create issues, set agendas, establish and implement rules or programs, and evaluate and/or adjudicate outcomes.”

The contributors to this book attempt to use the perspectives of “professional associations, advocacy groups, and multinational corporations…” There are “five bases from which governors draw authority and engender deference: institutional, delegated, expert, moral, and efficacious… Four general patterns are apparent in relations among governors: delegation, contracting, networks, and hierarchy.” These governors “raise questions about accountability and legitimacy in world politics…”

Four changes have propelled the importance of non-state governors. Globalization “has undermined the coincidence between social action and state borders… The Thatcher and Reagan-led privatization and deregulation revolution has only compounded this transfer of power to actors other than states… New technologies [have] eased communications, population flows, and the interchange of ideas… The end of the Cold War… loosened the restraints on international activity imposed by the superpower deadlock.”

The chapter addresses several faulty assumptions about the agents of global governance: the functionalist assumption that governance will supply “public goods” through some kind of hidden-hand mechanism; that global governance processes are instrumental acts of strategic choice whereas “action may be driven by powerful social norms of legitimate or appropriate behavior which interact with instrumental action in complex ways, highlighting unintended consequences, indeterminacy, and path dependence;” and that global governance is “a good thing” whereas, “Power, in its various forms, may make ‘cooperative action’ hard to distinguish from exploitation or domination.”

Governance in this book is seen as “more than simple coercion” and rule enforcement. “Governance involves the creation of new issues, new interests, and new modes of action by creative agents.” Power is “a resources and a tool for governors to use to lead, dispute, and shame, coerce, cajole and persuade.” Governors “operate in much more horizontal and ambiguous institutional contexts… More institutional fluidity might create more opportunities for diverse actors to shop for forums, shop for governors, and create new governing structures than would be possible in a more hierarchical context where laws, rules, and governing procedure are more clearly specified.”

Some issues of legitimacy rise out of the agents of global governance: qui bono or who benefits or is hurt and what vision of the public the governor is working for; accountability, in which “Governors often exercise great power over the lives of people far removed from them and who may have few avenues of redress or protest when they are harmed by a governor’s actions;” and examination of accountability should also include to whom governors are formally accountable, for what are they accountable, and what mechanisms exist to hold them accountable (transparency, participation, and funding are mentioned).

In the books first section about authority based on delegation, “Tamar Gutner examines the IMF as a governor whose authority has generally been delegated to it by member states, Alex Cooley focuses on contractors who are exercising authority in war zones delegated to them by states and international organizations and Abe Newman looks at the interaction between sub-state and supra-state ‘agents…”

“Next, several perspectives on expert based authority are offered by Allison Danner and Erik Voeten, Aseem Prakash and Mathew Potoski, and Tim Buthe. They suggest various paths by which expertise joins with other bases of authority to create rules (international environmental and electrical standards) and adjudicate them (international criminal tribunals).”

“In the section on morality based authority, both Charli Carpenter and Clifford Bob suggest new twists on morality based authority [hierarchies among issue networks and competing moral visions] and Karen Mundy demonstrates that agreement on principles does not necessarily translate into effective policy.”

The “final section pairs a chapter by Virginia Haufler about a governor that only reluctantly assumed efficacious authority [transnational corporations dealing with local political conflicts] with one by Kate McNamara where another governor intentionally constructed institutional authority [the European Union].”
This article reviews four books on transnational processes and their implications for comparative politics.

The books are:

- Anne-Marie Slaughter, A New World Order (2004)
- Sidney Tarrow, The New Transnational Activism (2005)

Distant Proximities proposes the “most radical version” of transnationalism, “by proclaiming a world moving beyond globalization into a period of fragmentation and integration, which [Rosenau] captures in the neologism ‘fragmegration.’” Globalizing trends like free market capitalism coexist with localizing trends like nationalism or environmental challenges. “Organizations and people are divided today into multiple global, local, and private worlds.”

The New Transnational Activism “suggests that processes of ‘complex internationalism,’ including the increasing influence of international organizations [Spanish fishermen’s protests against EU policies, anti-globalization protests at WTO and IMF meetings], create opportunity for transnational collective action.” Tarrow suggests locally-rooted activists are more effective than cosmopolitans. Despite transnational phenomena, “the local and national levels remain the decisive battle grounds of political change.”

Barnett and Finnemore examine intergovernmental organizations as independent bureaucracies that derive power “from three sources of authority: delegation by states, expertise based on knowledge, and moral standing based on their non-violent and universal mandates.” They show bureaucratic impulses and desire to survive and expand can lead to pathologies in intergovernmental organizations, raising questions of accountability.

“Slaughter sees global governance driven by the disaggregation of the state into increasingly autonomous units of judges, regulators, and parliamentarians working across borders with their counterparts on solving specific problems created by interdependence.”

The review traces the intellectual history of transnationalism in contemporary international relations: Keohane and Nye’s Transnational Relations and World Politics, which introduced non-state actors as autonomous agents; Gourevitch’s ‘second image reversed’ which examined the influence of international processes on domestic politics; liberal institutionalists ascribing independent roles to intergovernmental organizations; a flourishing generation of international relations scholars in the early 1990s that did not see state and non-state influence as competitive, and “the emergence of constructivism allowed students of transnationalism to better understand the role of normatively driven behavior and make claims about its significance beyond the realm of material capabilities.”

The review draws five lessons from these books: none of the books view globalization as a homogenizing and unifying force; “the books introduce a host of transnational non-state actors,” including ‘rooted cosmopolitans,’ ‘globals,’ ‘intergovernmental bureaucracies,’ and ‘transgovernmental networks;’ component parts of the state such as judicial and regulatory networks develop “competing allegiances as a result of membership in new transgovernmental networks;” agenda-setting and decision-making is becoming more “transnational in scope;” non-state actors “regularly interact with more traditional interests driven by concerns for security and economic wealth.”

Tarrow describes the process of ‘complex internationalism,’ which “denotes a political process whereby state and non-state actors use the growing complexity of global governance as an opportunity structure to mobilize and build coalitions beyond the nation state.” His work identifies “six strategies or processes of mobilization and coalition building… “Global framing and internalization denote efforts by domestic activists to appropriate external resources [symbols] for local causes. Diffusion and scale shift focuses on how global strategies and organizational forms spread from one locality to another.
Externalization and international coalition formation explore how local activists take their grievances directly to international institutions.” Tarrow and Rosenau are skeptical about the ability of transnational movements to produce public goods and argue they frequently lead to unintended and undesirable results, especially when local causes are taken out of context. These theories also extrapolate from primarily European and Anglo-Saxon experiences.

Rosenau: “‘Affirmative globals’ are those who have left any local connections behind, care about distant events, and develop mostly elite-driven polices in favor of globalizing trends. In contrast, ‘affirmative locals’ will be more passive in accepting (rather than shaping) globalizing trends, but will maintain a focus on their local lives and interests.”

“Tarrow claims that transnational collective action is most likely to produce sustainable results if it takes the form of a long-term and highly involved ‘campaign coalition’ (p. 167) rather than less (event-based) or more (federated) institutionalized forms of collaboration.”

Two areas of study for comparative politics include “understanding the role of transnational actors in influencing domestic politics and exploring the ‘domestic politics’ of international institutions and non-state actors.”
This article reviews several seminal books from the late 1990s and early 2000s on transnational civil society (TCS):


The review defines TCS as “self-organized advocacy groups that undertake voluntary collective action across state borders in pursuit of what they deem the wider public interest.” TCS actors are non-violent. In Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler, TCS actors are shown to be autonomous in contrast to the Gramscian thesis that they have “been co-opted by the state or that the power of multinational corporation invariably carries the day in the era of globalization… Evangelista marshals groundbreaking research to advance no less than the claim that transnational scientists prepared the ground for the peaceful end of the cold war through their peace activism on behalf of arms control issues including missile defense, nuclear testing, and conventional forces.” These studies show that TCS actors are “front and center in the evidence accounting for outcomes. These include the end of state repression and atrocities in El Salvador and Guatemala (Burgerman), the halt to individual dam projects affecting millions around the world (Khagram, in Florini), or ‘little’ victories such as the ‘simple realization that the man or woman concerned is not forgotten has often resulted in the prisoner receiving better treatment and an improvement in his conditions’ (Clark, 6).”

While TCS does not have the military and economic authorities of governments, it does not mean they are devoid of hard power through consumer boycotts, nor do they lack for financial resources. The scholarship reflects early constructivist work that established the importance of norms and their effects.

TCS actors have four major activities: agenda setting, developing solutions, building networks and coalitions of allies, and implementing solutions (often through “tactics of persuasion and pressure” to enforce compliance). “The tactic of initially creating weak framework treaties on environmental issues so that they can serve as the basis for more stringent protocols has often proved successful.” Despite starting with weak treaties, these norms grow to have stronger effects down the road. “Clark contends that Amnesty’s success results from the organization’s preference for principle over expedient compromises, but Galtung’s case study of Transparency International chronicles success of a pragmatic insider strategy versus the principled outsider strategy… [appealing] to both principle and self-interest” and reforming corrupt systems. The insider strategy does not always work. “Rebecca Johnson provides an interesting possible path through this thicket, arguing that efforts of grassroots and direct actionists are likely to have greater value when political conditions are unfavorable, whereas the strength of elite NGOs is in providing practical proposals.” This can resemble a “good cop-bad cop routine.”
“Campaigns target their messages and raise expectations; the resulting demands and pressure make the political decision makers insecure, which encourages them to turn to the incrementalists for ‘reasonable solutions and reassurance.’”

“Burgerman proposes an ‘interacting set of necessary conditions’ for the success of human rights groups in forging peace agreements: the existence of relevant international norms and transnational activism; the existence of elites in the target state that have control over the armed forces and that have concern about their (country’s) international reputation; and the existence of organized domestic groups linking up with transnational activists. Added to these propositions is the condition that ‘if a major power maintains overriding security or economic interests in the target state, it can inhibit the enforcement of human rights principles and agreements.’ The question this bears asking is, “How do decision makers come to be persuaded that the costs of violating norms are unacceptably high or that such actions are intolerably wrong?”

“Transnational activists derive their authority from three principal sources: expertise, moral influence, and a claim to political legitimacy… To disarm the rival rationalist explanation that scientists are merely used by politicians for their preferred policies, Evangelista skillfully reports occasions of scientists telling decision makers the opposite of what they wanted to hear yet still having profound influence on security policy… [T]he influence of activists deriving from expertise is often most pronounced in the prenegotiation phase of an emergent norm… [A]s negotiations entered crucial phases, civil society actors were increasingly squeezed out of the formal process,” though exceptions have occurred.

“There is a need for systematic research on the practice of including civil society actors in government negotiation delegations. To what extent have such activists joined government negotiating teams at the international negotiation table? For how long? How often? On what issues? And in what capacities? Such research should include systematic comparison of the role activists play depending on whether they are let in or shut out of the formal treaty process. This would enhance our understanding of the utility of insider versus outsider tactics. To the extent that further research finds that formal state negotiators pay heed to articulated or even anticipated demands of activists even when they are formally shut out, a more structural (as opposed to purely agentic) influence for transnational civil society would be suggested… Finally, more systematic research could examine the origins of the decision-making rules and procedures of conferences and treaty negotiations: are these largely set by statist or corporate imperatives, or has civil society had an important impact? Why are some decisions made by consensus (Clark, 61) while others are made by simple majority or two-thirds majority votes?”

“[T]he formulation that civil society relies on “principles rather than power” should be avoided in so far as it encourages the unhelpful dichotomy between ideas and power. The other volumes demonstrate abundantly that moral principles are a form of power (Florini, 10; Sikkink, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 303–4). Their enactment empowers some actors and not others, and while many techniques of TCS are persuasive as opposed to coercive, some of them are not: shaming and boycotts are clearly forms of coercion designed less to persuade than to change the cost calculus of targets…"

“[C]ritics of increased TCS influence… have voiced concerns about the accountability of transnational activists. These concerns contain several elements: the internal concern that NGOs are not democratic or accountable (transparent) organizations (Sikkink, in Khagram, 306, 314); that they are not representative and may reflect global disparities of influence, particularly a North-South divide (Sikkink, in Khagram, 307–8); and that their activities may subvert legitimate avenues of politics. These studies signal the potential of these issues to detract from the power of TCS actors, since so much of their power hinges on their legitimacy as agents addressing (not producing their own) democratic deficits. As such, activists ignore this concern at their peril. Sikkink (in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink) offers the interest-group model or professionalization model as useful suggestions for NGOs to consider in enhancing their representativeness and accountability (p. 315).…”

“[N]one of the authors here suggests that the state is about to disappear: the point is simply that we cannot understand some key outcomes in world politics without taking account of the influence of TCS actors… Often what occurs is a reconfiguring of state-society relations, and as numerous authors note, this can simultaneously empower the state in some respects while empowering civil society in others. The same holds for international institutions. Nelson and Donnelly find that while activism directed at the IMF and World Bank have had some successes, it has come at the price of enhancing IMF and World Bank influence over the debt-reduction process and through making financial assistance conditional on domestic policy change (Nelson, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 149; and Donnelly, in Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 166).”
"Evangelista in his “hard case” of the USSR dispels this notion [that authoritarian elites cannot be persuaded] by finding confirmation for the argument that activist influence in a “strong state”—with powerful centralized political institutions—is unlikely but can be very powerful once access is gained (p. 8). Conversely, “decentralized, fragmented states provide multiple points of access to policy entrepreneurs and their innovative ideas, but they have difficulty implementing the new policies” (p. 19)… The engagement strategy pursued by private citizens advocating reform in the face of cold official government relations ultimately proved powerful in undermining such tacit alliances of hard-liners. In that sense, Evangelista provides evidence challenging the contrary prescriptions of isolation, boycotts, sanctions, and the like to prod change.”

TCS activists are more likely to succeed if they link up to domestic activists, which "may also have a broader impact in invigorating the civil society sector more generally in a particular state." TCS activist should be mindful of the cultural match of their issues,"since crassly ignoring domestic cultural sensitivities will almost assuredly doom many a campaign to failure."

"In terms of international structure, a striking finding is that a number of advocacy campaigns have had some successes despite the lack of support of the great power states in the system. Particularly noteworthy were the coalitions of like-minded countries crucial to the successful negotiation of the Landmines Convention and International Criminal Court statute" Even the "existence of established international norms, institutions, and organizations [is seen] as an important variable affecting the chances of activist success." Scholars need to compare their counts of TCS actors results with other "explanations from material power and self-interest." There is not much empirical attribution of technology such as the internet to TCS activist success.

"The liberal cast of much TCS research has drawn the frequent complaint that it analyzes 'good' campaigns, but not 'bad' campaigns or failed campaigns... [T]he analytical program of understanding transnational civil society activists is neutral concerning the content of that activism—the National Rifle Association or neo-Nazi hate groups are as much within the analytical gambit of this literature as are Greenpeace or the Quakers."

TCS activism can lead to unintended consequences. "Clark shows the counterproductive and horrifying effect created by the increased spotlight on torture and disappearances resulting from prisoner-adoption techniques: some governments shifted to more deniable abuses such as simply eliminating their victims so they could not tell the story. Similarly, Khagram (in Florini) points out that opponents of big dams have not been good at suggesting alternatives and at recognizing the costs entailed in halting dams (lack of water, use of polluting alternatives for electricity, and so on)."

Reinicke posits that a bottom-up process from “loose alliances of government agencies, international organizations, corporations, and elements of civil society such as nongovernmental organizations, professional associations, or religious groups” will meet the challenges of globalization.

Formal policymaking institutions are finding it increasingly difficult to respond to the scale of global public problems, keep pace with technology and the speed of developing issues, or gather the diverse set of expertise for complex issues.

"Global public policy networks are helping policy makers meet these new challenges." Networks can provide and disseminate knowledge to policymakers, as well as help achieve consensus among stakeholders beyond government authorities. The World Conservation Union held workshops for NGOs, the private sector, and international organizations to resolve conflicts between sectoral parties that had brought large dam construction in the world to a standstill. Networks can correct market and intergovernmental failures. Microcredit lending networks have helped extend financial services to the poor. “The Global Reporting Initiative – a network connecting environmental NGOs, private firms, governments, and professional associations–is helping develop uniform standards for assessing the environmental impact of private corporations.” Other examples include the Global Environmental Facility, a multilateral funding mechanism for environmental projects, and Roll Back Malaria, a World Health Organization initiative made up of a trisectoral partnerships. The broadened partnerships in trisectoral networks help lend legitimacy and consensus.

Trisectoral networks are not meant to replace governments, but to improve governance. More governments and multilateral organizations are backing them. "Once a network has passed the early hurdles and established itself as a powerful voice on a particular global issue, its founders must be ready to step back and recruit constituents from other sectors for leadership roles." Sustained funding to a trisectoral network can lend it credibility.

"Through the 'strength of weak ties,' networks take maximum advantage of the tensions and differences among disparate groups." Many are dominated by institutions of the Global North and need to be broadened to include more voices in order to be truly global.

The state is now “sharing powers—including political, social, and security roles at the core of sovereignty—with businesses, with international organizations, and with a multitude of citizens groups, known as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).… Increasingly, resources and threats that matter, including money, information, pollution, and popular culture, circulate and shape lives and economies with little regard for political boundaries. International standards of conduct are gradually beginning to override claims of national or regional singularity.” While states continue to hold primacy in the area of security, nontraditional rather than state-based threats are rising.

Technology, especially the information revolution, plays an amplifying effect, “disrupt[ing] hierarchies, spreading power among more people and groups.” They tend to favor decentralized networks. Many non-state institutions—criminal organizations, civil society, and businesses—are adopting this form. The number and scale of nongovernmental organizations is proliferating.

The budgets of human rights organizations can exceed that of U.N. and government offices. “Today NGOs deliver more official development assistance than the entire U.N. system (excluding the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund).” NGOs are can compete with governments on international agreements, as when a coalition of labor, environmental, and other groups fought against the North American Free Trade Agreement. During the “Chiapas rebellion in southern Mexico in January 1994,” information spread across the internet tied the hands of the Mexican government to instigate a violent clampdown. Worldwide public opinion is increasingly a matter of concern for policymakers.

NGOs are increasingly being found in international treaty processes. In the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit of 1992, “NGOs set the original goal of negotiating an agreement to control greenhouse gases long before governments were ready to do so, proposed most of its structure and content, and lobbied and mobilized public pressure to force through a pact that virtually no one else thought possible when the talks began.”

Firms are increasingly multinational in outlook. “More and more frequently today, governments have only the appearance of free choice when they set economic rules. Markets are setting de facto rules enforced by their own power. States can flout them, but the penalties are severe --loss of vital foreign capital, foreign technology, and domestic jobs. Even the most powerful economy must pay heed. The U.S. government could choose to rescue the Mexican peso in 1994, for example, but it had to do so on terms designed to satisfy the bond markets, not the countries doing the rescuing.” Flows of capital and trade are also benefitting criminal organizations.

International organizations are increasingly viewing NGOs as a constituency. New norms, treaties, and “soft laws” are proliferating to address new global issues. Civil society has challenged notions of state sovereignty in the name of humanitarian intervention. NGOs are involved in monitoring state elections. International financial institutions are inserting themselves in domestic policy.

Authorities are increasingly overlapping, from new supranational institutions like the European Union to American states opening overseas trade offices. Officials in one policy area can ally with international actors against their own government officials in another policy area. Organizations with hybrid authorities from the state and private sector are regulating markets and establishing standards.

States and international institutions should embrace NGOs in order to improve governance. NGOs run the risk of stratifying international issues as “single-issue voters,” making it increasingly difficult to bring about needed large-scale change. Increased pluralism can make coordination and consensus difficult. States are still required to provide a baseline of governance. Supranational entities raise questions about representation and democracy. A diminishing of national identities could shift allegiances to other ideologies and authorities, bringing new challenges.

“Needed adaptations include a business sector that can shoulder a broader policy role, NGOs that are less parochial and better able to operate on a large scale, international institutions that can efficiently serve the dual masters of states and citizenry, and, above all, new institutions and political entities that match the transnational scope of today's challenges while meeting citizens' demands for accountable democratic governance.”
Slaughter gives examples of government officials, regulators, central bankers, legislators, and judges working across networks to govern issues that are increasingly transnational. As opposed to global public policy networks, officials with national authorities "can perform many of the functions of a world government--legislation, administration, and adjudication--without the form."

"Start thinking about a world of governments, with all the different institutions that perform the basic functions of governments--legislation, adjudication, implementation--interacting both with each other domestically and also with their foreign and supranational counterparts. States still exist in this world; indeed, they are crucial actors. But they are "disaggregated." They relate to each other not only through the Foreign Office, but also through regulatory, judicial, and legislative channels."

As global issues require more "governance," it has become increasingly difficult for international organizations to keep up, while private actors have attempted to fill in the space. "The governance dilemma thus becomes a trilemma: we need global rules without centralized power but with government actors who can be held to account through a variety of political mechanisms. These government actors can and should interact with a wide range of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but their role in governance bears distinct and different responsibilities. They must represent all their different constituencies, at least in a democracy; corporate and civic actors may be driven by profits and passions, respectively. 'Governance' must not become a cover for the blurring of these lines, even if it is both possible and necessary for these various actors to work together on common problems."

There is a shift from the unitary state to the disaggregated state: "It is regulators pursuing the subjects of their regulations across borders; judges negotiating minitreaties with their foreign brethren to resolve complex transnational cases; and legislators consulting on the best ways to frame and pass legislation affecting human rights or the environment." The idea that states "speak with one voice" obscure transnational horizontal networks between institutions of the state. In Slaughter's book, she illustrates this in three chapters: regulators, which "also identifies three broad types of networks: information networks, enforcement networks, and harmonization networks;" courts, resulting in a "global community of courts;" and legislative networks.

In Slaughter's new world order, "Global governance... is not a matter of regulating states the way states regulate their citizens, but rather of addressing the issues and resolving the problems that result from citizens going global--from crime to commerce to civic engagement." Chapter four of the book examines how international organizations can the disaggregate into these government networks.

In chapter five, Slaughter examines how government networks create convergence and divergence, improve compliance with international rules, and increasing international cooperation. Governments could find uses for networks in self-regulation, norm creation, building governance capacity, including in fragile states. Supranational institutions could reinforce these actions.

In the final chapter, Slaughter proposes five basic principles under the "horizontal norms of global deliberative equality [inclusion of voices], legitimate difference [pluralism], and positive comity [active engagement and participation], and the vertical norms of checks and balances and subsidiarity [locating governance at the lowest possible level]."

These networks currently are informal, alongside formal institutions. "[A] concept of sovereignty as participation, or status, means that disaggregated sovereignty would empower government institutions around the world to engage with each other in networks that would strengthen them and improve their ability to perform their designated government tasks individually and collectively."

Many issues fail to make it on the international agenda of “global civil society.” Despite “norm entrepreneurs… a permissive or inhibiting role is also played in issue emergence by actors with the ability to disseminate and promote new issues but who pick and choose among the range of possible emerging claims, launching some issues to prominence and side-lining others.” This role is referred to as “gatekeeper” who “in major international organizations have the power either to lend credibility, brand-value and resources to an emergent ‘issue’ or to block its entry into a transnational issue period. They can also affect how the issue is framed in global civil society, dramatically influencing how it is perceived by stakeholders, its potential for linkage to other issues, and its relational attributes within the ideational landscape of global civil society.” This paper uses the case of advocacy by groups on behalf of the issue of “children born of war” and UNICEF’s rejection as a gatekeeper.

In order for a norm entrepreneur to succeed, first there needs to be a problem to address, second a definition of an issue, third issue adoption, fourth issue emergence, fifth advocacy, sixth campaign, and seventh a new norm.

Gatekeepers are governors by the fact that they hold institutional power and can legitimize an issue. They are “an expression of structural relations of power within advocacy networks. The assymetrical influence of powerful organizations in a network stems from factors such as: relative connectivity to the rest of the network, name-recognition, financial capacity, linguistic, diplomatic and technical mastery and access to states and global policymakers.” Gatekeepers also have productive power by producing “new claims on the governance activities of states, NGOs and international organizations.”

Many groups or people can act in a gatekeeper role, including NGOs, governments, international organizations, the media, foundations, and even celebrities. Ultimately, “the relationship between the gatekeeper and issue entrepreneur is constituted by the relative political resources the gatekeeper can offer in a given context.” Resources can come in the form of formal authority or established expertise. Organizations that enter into a “niche market for advocacy can earn that organization’s gate-deeper status down the line.” Organizations with proven track records can attract grants. There are “political opportunity structures” such as consultative status at the United Nations that can give norm entrepreneurs access. These structures are recursive and feed back into each other. Demonstrating access to an agenda amplifies and organization’s access to other gatekeepers. Understanding of protocols and diplomatic processes can be considered “procedural expertise.” The individual gatekeepers are different depending on the goal.

UNICEF is a strong gatekeeper because of its institutional centrality, its moral authority, its brand recognition, and its revenue model of raising money from individuals rather than all from states.

Gatekeepers have an interest in remaining gatekeepers. They are very conscious of the scope of their mandates. They are concerned with organizational survival and are sensitive to funders. Individual gatekeepers are concerned with their careers and validating their perspectives on the world.

Gatekeepers can block issues by denying their relevance, making normative arguments against the issues, or limiting access to the norm entrepreneur (“symbolic placation”). Gatekeepers can also adopt issues incrementally.

There are some “issue attributes” that are more likely to be taken up by gatekeepers, especially those that have clear causal explanations, involve bodily harm, and can mete out justice to identifiable individuals. Some issues such as weapons taboos can be “grafted” on existing norms. Gatekeepers can also search for issues that have public visibility in order promote their activities. Gatekeepers issue interests can change overtime with their mandates. Spillover effects can occur in instances of issue concurrence, in which “adjacent issue networks” agree “over the appropriate frame for an issue.”

Empirically, there needs to be more research of issue non-adoptions. There are three challenges in this kind of research: identifying gatekeepers, levels of prominence of issues, and gatekeepers’ rationales for adoption. One area of research could be hyperlink analysis with the Internet. Websites also offer information about the points of view of gatekeepers.

There are also issues where it is not clear whether they have disappeared, yet have not been adopted.
Transnational advocacy movements have increasingly shaped action on moral issues. This article examines how they are able to catch the attention of and convince gatekeepers through strategic framing. This paper uses the campaign of debt relief to developing countries, usually an issue for financial governors, as a case. This paper examines domestic adoption, in the American Congress, of an international norm, the political beginning of which was a political pledge at the G-8 Cologne Summit in 1999. The mechanism to influence state behavior in this case is rhetorical action or strategic framing.

“Six conditions are potentially significant for framing success:” a permissive international context in which the policy agenda has room for the issues; focusing events that raise the profile of the issues, although these can be fleeting; credible information that provides causal explanation and practical actions; low costs, which is also complicated by benefits or lack thereof accrued to domestic constituencies and burden-sharing; cultural match or how the issue fits in a decision-maker’s normative context, which in the United States can include religious values; policy gatekeepers who can decide whether to act on or veto the issue, who adopt an institutional position.

The issue of debt relief began with the oil crisis in the 1970s and finance policymakers examining ways to minimize risks in middle-income country economies. It was largely a matter for finance policymakers until Jubilee 2000, an NGO campaign which sought to place the issue in G-7/8 Summit meetings. Over the course of the late 1990s and 2000s, donor countries wrote off hundreds of billions in debt. From a state interest perspective, debt relief was a small cost, but there were also issues of burden-sharing and moral hazard. From an individual interest perspective, decision-makers were pressured by campaigns and rallies, but did not face much overwhelming political pressure. The insight strategic framing provides into the equation, in that many donor countries rated highly on religious values and that the action was low cost. Members of the establishment also counted as advocates. However, this action was more costly for Japan, which also rated less in religious values, so it was more resistant.

The United States possessed a large number of gatekeepers sitting in different executive branch offices and multiple congressional committees. The expert credibility and religious framing and advocacy was able to bring together two branches and bipartisan support. A mixture of “political pressure, lobbying, and shaming” moved holdouts. In Japan, with a larger share of GDP devoted to ODA, with ODA as a key tool the country used to gain its status, and without a large Christian population, the country was opposed to debt relief. However, multilateral pressure by the West and particularly the United States led Japan to act. “Some might ascribe this policy change to coercion.”

Despite the praise directed by liberal scholars toward a growing global civil society, it also contains “organizational insecurity, competitive pressures, and fiscal uncertainty.” The authors argue “the growing number of IOs and INGOs within a given transnational sector increases uncertainty, competition, and insecurity for all organizations in that sector” and “marketization of many IO and INGO activities—particularly the use of competitive tenders and renewable contracting—generates incentives that produce dysfunctional outcomes.” The authors “draw on the New Economics of Organization (NEO), a body of theory that focuses on the incentives and institutional outcomes generated by contractual relations, incomplete information, transaction costs, and property rights… INGOs compete to raise money and secure contracts. These contracts, moreover, are performance based, renewable, and short term, creating counterproductive incentives and acute principal-agent problems. Opportunism and dysfunctional outcomes are particularly rife when groups seek control over the same project, a phenomenon known as ‘the multiple-principals problem.’” The authors find “nonprofit INGOs respond to contractual incentives and organizational pressures much like firms do in markets.”

The article examines three cases: “for-profit corporations operating in Kyrgyzstan under contracts from Western governments, international financial institutions, and the United Nations;” “how inter-NGO competition in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire), undercut the collective action necessary to protest misuse of refugee aid;” and “in wartime Bosnia, showing how inter-IO and INGO competition empowered local military commanders seeking to resist international efforts to protect prisoners of war (POWs).” The cases involve for-profit and nonprofit organizations, different geographic areas, and different sectors. “Some NGOs may resist material pressures, either because of idiosyncratic funding patterns, unique organizational cultures, or remarkable leaders or coalitions… It is vital that the international community devise workable solutions to the ‘NGO scramble.’”

“The growing reliance on INGOs and the marketization of transnationalism is propelled by searing critiques of project failures, demands for accountability by domestic politicians, and broad neoliberal agendas. Western, Japanese, and other aid donors are increasingly requiring aid contractors to bid competitively and demonstrate concrete results… Donors, moreover, seek to fund projects, not administrative overhead, hoping that this will push INGO contractors to rationalize procedures, demonstrate effectiveness, and slash overhead. They view marketization as a way to curb waste, improve professionalism, and enhance project implementation. Marketization can also generate support within donor countries by reassuring skeptical legislators that foreign assistance is being spent responsibly and efficiently.”

“When an organizations survival depends on making strategic choices in a market environment characterized by uncertainty, its interests will be shaped, often unintentionally, by material incentives… IOs and INGOs behave similarly to other organizations, internalizing the values, goals, and methods of their institutional environment through imitation and isomorphism. The more that nonprofit groups attempt to secure and maintain contracts under market-generated pressures, the more they will copy the structures, interests, and procedures of their for-profit counterparts. The influence of material incentives is further bolstered by the organizational structures of aid INGOs emulating private-sector models. Most large nonprofit groups have developed elaborate structures for handling public relations, fund-raising, internal audits and accounting, human resources, and the like.” As “transnational organizations are embedded in market-based institutions created by contracts,” survival is a critical concern for INGOs.

Donor-contractor-recipient relations “can be modeled as a double set of ‘principal-agent’ problems’ wherein the donor is a ‘principal’ and contractors are ‘agents’… an agent’s fulfillment of a principal’s directives cannot be taken for granted, and donor-principals face the problems of hidden action and information.” Contractors and recipients can guide resources to their own ends. Information can be concealed if there are execution problems. Evaluations present dilemmas in information disclosure. “The more contractors there are, the more each organization’s position within the market seems insecure. As a result, some organizations may seek to undermine competitors, conceal information, and act unilaterally. Rather than burden and cost sharing, this generates duplication, waste, incompatible goals, and collective inefficiencies. In addition, competing multiple contractors often dilute the coherence of their collective project goals, advice, and strategies.” Coordination problems between NGOs are often caused by competition.

In the Kyrgyzstan case, the international donor and NGO community came in after the collapse of the Soviet Union to implement technical assistance programs. This often took the form of NGOs drafting laws for the Kyrgyz government to support these programs. “Contrary to public proclamations by the Kyrgyz government, donors, and INGOs, institutional
change has not been rapidly forthcoming. Instead entrenched state and social interests have drained most substance from these reform initiatives… While uncooperative Kyrgyz bureaucracies and political factions are responsible for watering down of TAPs, their continuation is explained by the institutional environment in which INGO contractors and recipients operate… [b]ecause donors often ask recipients whether the contractor’s project should be renewed, contractors are likely to permit and even conceal recipient obstructions so as to curry favor with recipients… Contractors also provide recipients with perks to maintain good relations… Both recipients and INGO contractors, however, conceal these and other project problems from donors to help ensure renewal of their contracts.”

Interdonor and NGO competition also led to “an increasingly marketized aid environment in which IOs and INGOs feel required to demonstrate their ability to spend monies and win influence, regardless of broader project outcomes… For instance, during discussions over how to restructure the state-owned energy company, KyrgyzEnergo, IOs and INGOs submitted contradictory proposals… Although aid donors and contractors are rhetorically committed to cooperation and broadly shared goals, they are pushed into competition by their institutional environment, which pits actors within similar sectors against one another in a struggle for survival and contract renewal.” While failure to reform the Kyrgyzstan government can be blamed on domestic political characteristics, “the issue of why projects continue to receive international funding is best explained by the political economy of the donor-contractor-recipient relationship.” Contractors that rely on grants have little incentive to discourage further donor efforts.

In the Goma case, “competitive contract bidding created powerful disincentives for Refugee Help, a respected private Western relief organization, to strongly protest aid diversion by Hutu militants and suspected war criminals,” despite “its stated commitment to a deeply ethical view of global affairs.” In the wake of the Rwandan crisis, the international humanitarian relief community flooded into Goma. Refugee Help’s ability to secure contracts was important to its presence and its profile, both of which would improve its long-term prospects. Although international aid helped, “the refugee camps became de facto safe havens for Hutu fighters… serve as rear bases for cross-border guerilla operations… fighters sold some relief items on the open market and used the camp population as a source of political legitimacy. Critics accused the UNHCR and its aid contractors of indirectly fueling the conflict and unwittingly aiding Hutu war criminals.”

“[O]fficials in Refugee Help’s headquarters were reluctant to encourage self-critical analysis or to publicly protest aid diversions…” and those “who fended off competitors, renewed UNHCR contracts, and ensured smooth delivery systems were valued for their work… NGO staffers were frustrated with both the UNHCR and the Zairean government’s refusal to crack down on Hutu militants… Refugee Help officials attributed [lack of introspection] to the frantic pace of work, including Goma’s prevailing ‘contract fever,’ concern about losing aid contracts, and fear of inspiring a violent reaction by Hutu extremists… Competition among international relief groups also undercut the potential for Refugee Help-led collective action… [O]ne expert notes a decline in NGOs’ ability to resist Goma-like problems of aid diversion: ‘Competition for turf and difficulties of coordination… make [today’s] humanitarian actors easy targets for political actors seeking access to the scarce resources they control.” Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) replaced “its relief operations with an advocacy campaign pushing for limits on Hutu militant camp presence…. MSF’s experience is the exception that proves the rule: It was able to protest aid abuse only by opting out of the Goma contract system altogether.”

In the Bosnia case, competitive pressures led to actors [the ICRC, UNPROFOR, and ECMM] intending to promote humanitarian law and prisoners rights to “unduly empower… Bosnian Serbs, Croat, and Muslim military commanders, helping them to evade international prisoner monitoring by playing the three international groups off against one another… The presence of multiple international monitors threatened the welfare of POWs by empowering POW prison commanders to resist proper inspections. Prison authorities preferred the UN and ECMM visits to those of the ICRC, because the latter were more intrusive. Openness to international monitoring was a public relations gain, but the UN or ECMM visits were quicker, simpler, and less likely to provoke difficult questions about the fate of individual prisoners or the conditions in which POWs were held. The three-way competition for prison inspections also helped Bosnian commanders to play one IO off against another. When ICRC representatives demanded access to a POW camp, commanders often balked, saying that they had already been visited by [others],” even if sometimes they hadn’t. Other aid sectors faced competitive pressures as well, where “‘NGOs, in order to survive, were being drawn to new areas where they had no special expertise and little interest.’”

The authors argue, “organizational density and marketization pose formidable challenges to the consolidation of… a transnational civil society.” Further research could examine more regions and sectors. Different contexts can create different markets: “conflicts may take place near or within strong states capable of creating barriers to entry, limiting the penetration
of transnational actors and reducing interorganizational competition. Elsewhere, competition could be reduced by declining donor interest or tacit donor agreements to divide the aid market… A single donor or aid contract may dominate… crowding out rivals and creating a more stable transnational hierarchy.” The authors’ analysis is not an ethical accusation, rather it highlights opportunism as “a rational response to institutional configurations of material interests…” Donors and recipients can work together to alleviate competitive pressures. “Catholic Relief Services… has rejected contracts… when it believes that the projects are misguided.” Religious groups have “access to less competitive funding.” Extending contracts can help. The authors point to Afghanistan as a critical place to reform the “NGO scramble.” Understanding the material incentives of NGOs can help.

In this introductory chapter, the authors explore issues in transnational advocacy networks, and “address four main questions: (1) What is a transnational advocacy network? (2) Why and how do they emerge? (3) How do advocacy networks work? (4) Under what conditions can they be effective—that is, when are they most likely to achieve their goals?”

The authors use the term networks as the structure for cooperation is loose and actors view themselves that way. Advocacy networks “promote causes, principled ideas, and norms…” “Major actors in advocacy networks may include the following: (1) international and domestic nongovernmental research and advocacy organizations; (2) local social movements; (3) foundations; (4) the media; (5) churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, and intellectuals; and (7) parts of the executive and/or parliamentary branches of government… “Groups in a network share values and frequently exchange information and services.” Often foundations fund NGOs that will provide services.

“[C]ampaigns are sets of strategically linked activities in which members of a diffuse principled network (what social movement theorists would call a “mobilization potential”) develop explicit, visible ties and mutually recognized roles in pursuit of a common goal (and generally against a common target). Core network actors mobilize others… they connect groups to each other, seek out resources, propose and prepare activities, and conduct public relations. They must also consciously seek to develop a ‘common frame of meaning.’”

Aspects of campaigns that can be analyzed include relationships—collaborative or adversarial connections; resources—including “information, leadership, and symbolic or material capital;” and international and domestic institutional structures—with domestic structures categorized as “state structure (centralized vs. fragmented), societal structure (weak vs. strong), and policy networks (consensual vs. polarized). Similarly, social movement theorists agree that understanding the political context or “opportunity structure” is key both to understanding a movement’s emerging and to gauging its success.”

“Advocacy networks are not new. We can find examples as far back as the nineteenth-century campaign for the abolition of slavery. But their number, size, and professionalism, and the speed density, and complexity of the international linkages among them has grown dramatically in the last three decades.”

“Transnational advocacy networks appear most likely to emerge around those issues where (1) channels between domestic groups and their governments are blocked or hampered or where such channels are ineffective for resolving a conflicts, 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 networks; and (3) conferences and other forms of international contact create arenas for forming and strengthening networks.” The boomerang patterns occurs when local groups bypass domestic government to bring its issue to international attention, from where further pressure can be applied.

“Since [advocacy networks] are not powerful in a traditional sense of the word, they must use the power of their information, ideas, and strategies to alter the information and value contexts within which stakes make policies… Our typology of tactics that networks use in their efforts at persuasion, socialization, and pressure includes (1) information politics, or the ability to quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it to where it will have the most impact; (2) symbolic politics, or the ability to call upon symbols, actions, or stories that make sense of a situation for an audience that is frequently far away; (4) 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 (4) accountability politics, or the effort to hold powerful actors to their previously stated policies or principles. A single campaign may contain many of these elements simultaneously.”

Activists can frame reframe issues as “Land use rights in the Amazon, for example, took on an entirely different character and gained quite different allies viewed in a deforestation frame than they did in either social justice or regional development frames.” The authors argue that declaration by some states of having human rights in their national interests is a “transformed understanding of national interest, possible in part because of structured interactions between state components and networks.” Activists can engage in “venue shopping,” which is “the dual strategy of the presentation of an image and the search for a more receptive political venue.” For example, in this is done in the “coupling of indigenous rights and environmental issues.”
“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. These aims require clear, powerful messages that appeal to shared principles, which often have more impact on state policy than advice of technical experts. An important part of the political struggle over information is precisely whether an issue is defined primary as technical—and thus subject to consideration by ‘qualified experts’—or as something that concerns a broader global constituency… There is frequently a huge gap between the story’s original telling and the retellings—in its sociocultural context, its instrumental meaning, and even in its language. Local people, in other words, sometimes lose control over their stories in a transnational campaign… The notion of ‘reporting facts’ does not fully express the way networks strategically use information to frame issues. Networks call attention to issues, or even create issues by using language that dramatizes and draws attention to their concerns.”

“Nongovernmental networks have helped legitimize the use of testimonial information along with technical and statistical information. Linkage of the two is crucial, for without the individual cases activists cannot motivate people to seek changed policies. Increasingly, international campaigns by networks take this two-level approach to information… Both technical and dramatic testimony help to make the need for action more real for ordinary citizens… Nongovernmental actors depend on their access to information to help make them legitimate players.”

“Activists frame issues by identifying and providing convincing explanations for powerful symbolic events, which in turn become catalysts for the growth of networks… Often it is not one event, but the juxtaposition of disparate events that makes people change their minds and act. For many people in the United States it was the juxtaposition of the coup in Chile, the war in Vietnam, Watergate, and the Civil Rights Movement that gave birth to the human rights movement.”

“Activists in advocacy networks are concerned with political effectiveness. Their definition of effectiveness often includes some policy change by “target actors” such as governments, international financial institutions like the World Bank, or private actors like transnational corporations… Material leverage usually links the issue to money or goods (but potentially also to votes in international organizations, prestigious offices, or other benefits).” Human rights groups have been able to gain “leverage by providing policymakers with information that convinced them to cut off military or economic aid.” NGO “credibility still depends in part on their ability to mobilize their own members and affect public opinion via the media… Moral leverage involves what some commentators have called ‘mobilization of shame’, where the behavior of target actors is held up to the light of international scrutiny.”

Networks can make government “statements into opportunities for accountability politics…” and “can use those positions, and their command information, to expose the distance between discourse and practice.” Domestic structures and form of government can lead to networks emphasizing different approaches, for example, a “large number of U.S. advocacy organizations… specialize in litigation.”

The authors “identify the following types or stages of network influence: (1) issue creation and agenda setting; (2) influence on discursive positions of states and international organizations; (3) influence on institutional procedures; (4) influence on policy change in ‘target actors’ which may be states, international organizations like the World Bank, or private actors like the Nestle Corporation; and (5) influence on state behavior…. Procedural changes can greatly increase the opportunity for advocacy organizations to develop regular contact with other key players on an issue, and they sometimes offer the opportunity to move from outside to inside pressure strategies.”

“The real creativity of advocacy networks has been in finding intentionalist frames within which to address some elements of structural problems… Network actors argue that in such reframing they are weakening the structural apparatus of patriarchy, poverty, and inequality and empowering new actors to address these problems better in the future.” The authors find issues causing bodily harm, “especially when there is a short and clear causal chain (or story) assigning responsibility; and (2) issues involving legal equality of opportunity” are have been the most prominent organizers and the most effective.

“Networks operate best when they are dense, with many actors, strong connections among groups in the network, and reliable information flows… Target actors must be vulnerable either to material incentives or to sanctions from outside actors, or they must be sensitive to pressure because of gaps between stated commitments and practice… Countries that are most susceptible to network pressures are those that aspire to belong to a normative community of nations.”

The “new transnationalism” is a blurs international and domestic politics. The authors “distinguish three categories [of transnational networks] based on their motivations: those with essentially instrumental goals, especially transnational
corporations and banks; (2) those motivated primarily by *shared causal ideas*, such as scientific groups or epistemic communities; and (3) those motivated primarily by *shared principled ideas or values* (transnational advocacy networks).” The first is more materially motivated, the second is uses technical expertise, the third uses “information and beliefs to motivate political action and to use leverage to gain the support of more powerful institutions.” The authors reject “an economically reductionist notion of interests…” that are common in “both pluralist and elitist theories.” The authors draw from ideas of policy communities, John Kingdon’s public agenda, and social movement theory.

The authors view transnational advocacy networks as different from “transnational social movements or global civil society…” These interactions involve much more agency than a pure diffusionist perspective suggests… No more mere automatic ‘enactors [of routine norms],’ [transnational advocacy networks] seek to amplify the generative power of norms, broaden the scope of practices those norms engender, and sometimes even renegotiate or transform the norms themselves.” The authors claim, “much international activity presumes… that it is both legitimate and necessary for states or nonstate actors to be concerned about the treatment of the inhabitants of another states.” States can be expected “to cooperate and block network activities” as bringing pressure to domestic practices “undermine absolute claims to sovereignty,” as “producing information that contradicts information provided by states… imply that states sometimes lie.”