



Human Rights, Principled Issue-Networks, and Sovereignty in Latin America

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The human rights issue is an important case study of how understandings of sovereignty currently are being reshaped in the world and of the important role of transnational actors in that process. The doctrine of internationally protected human rights offers one of the most powerful critiques of sovereignty as currently constituted, and the practices of human rights law and human rights foreign policies provide concrete examples of shifting understandings of the scope of sovereignty. In this article, I argue that human rights policies and practices are contributing to a gradual, significant, and probably irreversible transformation of sovereignty in the modern world and that this shift cannot be explained without taking into account the role of transnational nonstate actors.

In the post–World War II period, a human rights movement helped create regional and international human rights regimes. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) formed part of a network of organizations working together on behalf of human rights, a network that also included parts of global and regional intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and private foundations. I refer to this broader set of organizations as an international issue-network.¹

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1. There is a large literature in organization theory on network analysis, some of which is relevant to the case presented here. For an overview of this literature, see Howard Aldrich and David A. Whetten, "Organization-sets, Action-sets, and Networks: Making the Most of Simplicity," in Paul Nystrom and W. Starbuck, eds., *Handbook of Organizational Design* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 385–408. This organization literature occasionally has been applied to international relations. See Christer Jonsson, "Interorganization Theory and International Organization," *International Studies Quarterly* 30 (March 1986), pp. 39–57; and Gayl D. Ness and Steven R. Brechin, "Bridging the Gap: International Organizations as Organizations," *International Organization* 42 (Spring 1988), pp. 245–73. Kamarotos applies network theory to the human

These networks differ from other forms of transnational relations, such as epistemic communities or transnationally organized interest groups, in that they are driven primarily by shared values or principled ideas—ideas about what is right and wrong—rather than shared causal ideas or instrumental goals.²

This argument will be explored through a comparative study of the impact of international human rights pressures on Argentina and Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s.³ Both are large countries with traditions of jealously guarding their sovereign prerogatives. Both have had problematic human rights practices, although the Argentine human rights record was much more serious during the period of the so-called dirty war from 1976 to 1980. The international human rights network worked intensively on Argentina, contributing to improved practices by the early 1980s. The network did not focus on Mexico, however, and lower-level but endemic abuses continued throughout the 1980s. Only after the network concentrated international attention on Mexico after 1987 did the Mexican government take moves to improve human rights practices.

Sovereignty and human rights

The debate over human rights is embedded in a more fundamental debate over the changing nature of sovereignty in the modern world. Sovereignty is often seen as a series of claims about the nature and scope of state authority.⁴ Claims about sovereignty are forceful, however, because they represent shared understandings and expectations that are constantly reinforced both through the practices of states⁵ and the practices of nonstate actors.

rights issue but uses much narrower definitions of network and of organizational environment than the research presented here; see Alexander S. Kamarotos, "A View into NGO Networks in Human Rights Activities: NGO Action with Special Reference to the UN Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-commission," paper presented at a convention of the International Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 10–14 April 1990. Another recent discussion that mentions networks in human rights is Ronnie D. Lipschutz, "Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21 (Winter 1992), pp. 389–420.

2. Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane classify beliefs into three groups in the introduction to their edited volume, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, forthcoming). Ideas that specify criteria for determining whether actions are right or wrong and whether outcomes are just or unjust are called shared principled beliefs. Beliefs about cause–effect relationships are called shared causal beliefs. At a more fundamental level is a third category of ideas about the universe of possibilities for action. Human rights is primarily about a set of shared principled ideas, but to the degree that human rights ideas challenge understandings of sovereignty, they also work at the level of defining possibilities for action. On epistemic communities, see Peter M. Haas, ed., "Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination," special issue, *International Organization* 46 (Winter 1992), pp. 1–390.

3. For a related study that examines the impact of U.S. human rights policy using a two-level game approach, see Lisa Martin and Kathryn Sikkink, "U.S. Policy and Human Rights in Argentina and Guatemala, 1973–1980," in Peter Evans, Harold Jacobson, and Robert Putnam, eds., *Double-edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

4. Stephen Krasner, "Westphalia," in Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*.

5. Wendt stresses that sovereignty is an institution that exists "only in virtue of certain

Traditionally, as stated by the World Court, the doctrine of state sovereignty has meant that the state “is subject to no other state, and has full and exclusive powers within its jurisdiction.”⁶ Inevitably, international activities to protect human rights contradict a core premise of traditional sovereignty that, as Louis Henkin has put it, “how a state behaved toward its own citizens in its own territory was a matter of domestic jurisdiction, i.e., not any one else’s business and therefore not any business for international law.”⁷ International human rights work presupposes that it is legitimate and necessary for states or nonstate actors to be concerned about the treatment of the inhabitants of other states. The international human rights network seeks to redefine what is essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of states. The question to be addressed here is whether these pressures succeed in changing state understandings and in improving human rights practices. If they do, the meaning of sovereignty has been modified because shared understandings about the scope of state authority and the practices that reflect those understandings are transformed.

Neither the practice nor the doctrine of internal sovereignty has ever been absolute. National political leaders always have faced some international constraints on how they could treat their own subjects. The Treaty of Augsburg and the Peace of Westphalia, for example, limited the discretion of the monarch in controlling the practice of religion of his subjects, and the campaign for the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century made clear that certain extreme practices would be an object of international concern and action. But until World War II, in the widest range of issues the treatment of subjects remained within the discretion of the state; no important legal doctrine challenged the supremacy of the state’s absolute authority within its borders. The moral flaw to internal sovereignty that became glaring during World War II was that if the state itself posed the primary threat to the well-being of citizens, these citizens had nowhere to turn for recourse or protection.

In spite of different languages and approaches, many discussions of sovereignty in international relations share certain characteristics. Most views of sovereignty are so penetrated by state-centric logic that they continue to focus

intersubjective understandings and expectations; there is no sovereignty without an other.” He argues that sovereignty norms are now so taken for granted, that “it is easy to overlook the extent to which they are both presupposed by and an ongoing artifact of practice.” See Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46 (Spring 1992), pp. 391–425. The quotations are drawn from pp. 412–13.

6. This classical definition of sovereignty is given by the World Court in the Wimbledon case, as cited on page 164 of Stanley Hoffmann, “International Systems and International Law,” in Richard A. Falk and Saul H. Mendlovitz, eds., *The Strategy of World Order*, vol. 2, *International Law* (New York: World Law Fund, 1966), pp. 134–66.

7. Louis Henkin, *How Nations Behave: Law and Foreign Policy*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 228. Also see James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 20; and Nancy Newcomb Haanstad, “Compulsory Jurisdiction Over Human Rights and Domestic Jurisdiction,” Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1984, p. iv.

almost exclusively on states and the understandings and practices of states as the sole determinant of sovereignty.⁸ These views are usually abstract and static. Even theorists critical of standard understandings of sovereignty are so concerned with exposing how the discourse of sovereignty is constructed and maintained that they often ignore the ways in which conceptions of the state are evolving.⁹

If sovereignty is a shared set of understandings and expectations about the authority of the state and is reinforced by practices, then a change in sovereignty will come about by transforming understandings and practices. In this sense, the expansion of human rights law and policy in the postwar period represented a conscious, collective attempt to modify this set of shared understandings and practices. Although the idea of internationally protected human rights was placed on the international agenda when the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, that idea was not initially translated into a modification of sovereignty in practice or to effective protection of human rights. The only exception was in Europe, where the European Convention on Human Rights and the practices of the European human rights system began to have a gradual but profound impact on modifying state sovereignty.¹⁰

To become effective, the means had to be found to translate the human rights ideals of the declaration and treaties of the postwar period into widely shared understandings and practices. The human rights network helped foster these means in two ways. International organizations developed formal procedures to discuss and investigate human rights situations in member states. But formal procedures are ineffective if not used. The work of NGOs made states' repressive practices more visible and salient, thus forcing states that otherwise would have remained silent to respond. As they became more aware of human rights violations, some states demanded explanations from others. Faced with increased pressures, repressive states tried to provide justifications. In the give-and-take of exposing violations, demanding explanations, providing justifications, and changing practices, states and NGOs gradually questioned traditional understandings of sovereignty and began constructing the elements of a modified sovereignty. When a state recognizes the legitimacy of international interventions on the topic of human rights and changes its domestic

8. See Krasner, "Westphalia"; Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 95–96; and F. H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

9. See, for example, Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It"; and Richard Ashley, "Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 17 (Summer 1988), pp. 227–61.

10. Sieghart regards the European Convention on Human Rights as "a substantial retreat from the previously sacred principle of national sovereignty"; see Paul Sieghart, *The Lawful Rights of Mankind: An Introduction to the International Legal Code of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 67–68. See also Rosalyn Higgins, "The European Convention on Human Rights," in Theodor Meron, ed., *Human Rights in International Law: Legal and Policy Issues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 538.

human rights practices in response to these international pressures, it reconstitutes the relationship between the state, its citizens, and international actors.

To make the argument about the transformation of sovereignty more precise, I will specify a continuum of state actions and declarations that move from reinforcing traditional understandings of the scope of sovereignty to revealing a reconceptualized sovereignty in which a state accepts that gross violations of human rights will no longer be an issue solely within its domestic jurisdiction.

In the human rights realm, this continuum would start with the state denial of the legitimacy and refusal to cooperate with any international human rights pressures or interventions. In the second stage the state would accept the legitimacy of international human rights practices, as evidenced by its statements in international forums, ratification of the relevant human rights treaties, and cooperation with international human rights organizations but not change domestic repressive practices. The passage from denial to lip service may seem insignificant but suggests an important shift in the shared understandings of states that make certain justifications no longer acceptable. The endpoint of the continuum, that is, reconstituted sovereignty, would involve the above recognition of legitimacy and cooperation and also concrete responses to international pressures that change domestic human rights practices. Argentina and Mexico are useful cases to explore changing conceptions of sovereignty, since both have a diplomatic tradition of intransigent defense of the doctrine of internal sovereignty and noninterference. Changes in the understandings and practices of these two states with regard to international human rights pressures serve as an indication of how sovereignty is being reconceptualized.

The human rights issue does not presage an alternative to sovereignty, but it suggests a future model in which understandings of sovereignty are modified in relation to specific issues that are deemed of sufficient importance to the international community to limit the scope of sovereign authority. We can see this modification of sovereignty occurring in other specific issue-areas as well, such as the environment, the delivery of emergency food supplies, and the protection of minorities. As such, human rights is not simply another exception to the rule of sovereignty but part of a significant though circumscribed subset of international issues for which modified understandings of sovereignty are increasingly accepted and practiced.

The international human rights issue-network

An international issue-network comprises a set of organizations, bound by shared values and by dense exchanges of information and services, working internationally on an issue. The diverse entities that make up the international human rights issue-network include parts of IGOs at both the international and

regional levels, international NGOs on human rights, domestic NGOs on human rights, and private foundations. Other issue-networks will include a somewhat different array of actors; but international and domestic NGOs play a central role in all issue-networks. They are the most proactive members of the networks, usually initiating actions and pressuring more powerful actors to take positions.

The role of shared values as the basis of the issue-networks helps explain the central involvement of many voluntary NGOs in networks. Activists join NGOs because they believe strongly in the principles of the organizations, not because of any tangible benefits that they receive from membership. Since these organizations survive on donations, voluntary labor, and the dedication of underpaid staff, the NGOs that succeed and thrive are those that have a strong message capable of mobilizing their staff, membership, and public opinion.¹¹

The organizations in the network that have been most important for human rights in Latin America include the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Amnesty International (AI), Americas Watch, the Washington Office on Latin America, domestic NGOs like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and the Academy of Human Rights in Mexico, and the Ford Foundation, as well as foundations based in Europe that fund international and domestic human rights NGOs.

To have a strong network, it must have a certain size and density. In other words, enough actors must exist and be connected in order to speak meaningfully of a network. Much of the history of the emergence of the human rights network is the story of the founding, growth, and linking of the organizations in the network. Groups in a network share values and frequently exchange information and services.¹² The shared values that bind the actors in the human rights network are embodied in international human rights law, especially in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This body of law serves to justify actions and provides a common language to make arguments and procedures to advance claims. The flow of information among actors in the network reveals an extremely dense web of interconnections among these groups. In most cases, this flow of information takes place informally through the exchange of reports, telephone calls, and attendance at conferences and meetings. In other cases,

11. Mansbridge has made a similar point discussing groups that organized around the Equal Rights Amendment debate in the United States. See Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 3.

12. Organization theory uses a variety of ways to think about relations among organizations. Mitchell refers to three types of content of relations: (1) communicative content, or the passing of information from one organization to another, (2) exchange content, and (3) normative content. See J. Clyde Mitchell, "Networks, Norms, and Institutions," in Jeremy Boissevain and J. Clyde Mitchell, eds. *Network Analysis* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), pp. 2–35. To document these linkages, researchers investigate the exchange of resources, communication among staff, friendship or kinship ties, and overlapping boards of directors among organizations. See Aldrich and Whetten, "Organization-sets, Action-sets, and Networks," p. 391.

the connections are formalized, as when NGOs with official consultative status with IGOs present reports to those organizations. A third type of interconnection among the organizations is the flow of funds and services. This is especially the case of relations among foundations and NGOs, but some NGOs also may provide services such as training for other NGOs in the network. As a result of this exchange of information and services, of flows of funds, and of shared norms and goals, the members of the issue-network work together in a constant but informal, uncoordinated, and nonhierarchical manner.

The history of the emergence of international human rights regimes has been discussed at length elsewhere and does not need to be repeated here.¹³ What is often missed, however, is how NGOs helped spur state action at each stage in the emergence of the human rights regimes.¹⁴ In two of the main international precursors to the human rights issue—the movement for respect for human rights during armed conflict and the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery—NGOs brought the issue to public attention and promoted international action.¹⁵ The Red Cross movement spearheaded the activities that created the law of human rights in armed conflict.¹⁶ A group of NGOs, the Anti-slavery League, led the campaign to protect the rights of those held in slavery and eventually to abolish slavery. The league helped persuade states to adopt the 1926 convention outlawing slavery.¹⁷

Likewise, at the San Francisco conference at which the UN charter was drafted, NGOs played a pivotal role in securing the inclusion of human rights language in the final charter. The initial big power drafts of the UN Charter had hardly mentioned human rights.¹⁸ NGOs representing churches, trade unions, ethnic groups, and peace movements, aided by the delegations of some of the smaller countries, “conducted a lobby in favor of human rights for which there is no parallel in the history of international relations, and which was

13. See Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), especially the table on pp. 224–25, for a summary of the evolution of human rights regimes and for an explanation of the differences between declaratory and enforcement regimes.

14. For a discussion of the role of NGOs in the building of international action on human rights and U.S. foreign policy, see David Forsythe, *Human Rights and World Politics*, 2d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 83–101 and 127–59; and Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy Toward Latin America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 74–93, 104–8, and 373–74.

15. David Weissbrodt and Teresa O’Toole, “The Development of International Human Rights Law,” in Amnesty International U.S.A. Legal Support Network, ed., *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948–1988: Human Rights, the United Nations and Amnesty International* (New York: Amnesty International, 1988), pp. 17–33; and Forsythe, *Human Rights and World Politics*, pp. 7–10.

16. For a discussion of the role of the Red Cross in international politics, see David P. Forsythe, *Humanitarian Politics: The International Committee of the Red Cross* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and J. D. Armstrong, “The International Committee of the Red Cross and Political Prisoners,” *International Organization* 39 (Autumn 1985), pp. 615–42.

17. Forsythe, *Human Rights and World Politics*, pp. 7–9.

18. Jacob Robinson, *Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the Charter of the United Nations* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1946), p. 17.

largely responsible for the human rights provisions of the Charter,” in John Humphrey’s words.¹⁹

Although nongovernmental actors were central to the campaign against slavery and to the work of including human rights language in the UN Charter, they were not yet issue-networks: there were relatively few actors and there were not the dense and constant flows of information that characterize networks. In the 1970s, as the number of human rights actors increased and these actors consciously developed linkages with each other, the human rights issue-network emerged. Although international human rights norms emerged out of the world reaction to the Holocaust, these norms were subordinated to anticommunism during the period of the cold war. With the advent of détente in the early 1970s, a more permissive environment was created for the consideration of human rights, and the convergence of some shocking cases of human rights abuses, such as in Chile and in Greece, moved world opinion.²⁰ In reaction to these conditions, all types of human rights organizations in the network increased in the 1970s, with the expansion of NGOs, in particular, giving impetus to the growth of the network as a whole.

International NGOs

Although some human rights organizations have existed for many years, in the 1970s and 1980s human rights NGOs proliferated and increased in diversity (38 in 1950, 72 in 1960, 103 in 1970, 138 in 1980, and 275 in 1990).²¹ This explosion of NGOs is indicated not only by the increasing number of organizations but also by the formation of coalitions and communications networks designed to link those groups together.²² In turn, these international human rights organizations developed strong links to domestic human rights organizations in countries experiencing human rights violations. This growth in

19. John P. Humphrey, *Human Rights and the United Nations: A Great Adventure* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Transnational Publishers, 1984), p. 13. Also see U.S. Department of State, *The United Nations Conference on International Organization, San Francisco, California, April 25 to June 26, 1945: Selected Documents* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946).

20. This discussion on why human rights gained importance in the 1970s is developed further in Kathryn Sikkink, “The Power of Principled Ideas: The Origins and Continuity of Human Rights Policies in the United States and Western Europe,” in Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*.

21. The oldest of human rights organizations, the Anti-slavery Society, was founded in 1839, but most international human rights NGOs have emerged since World War II. For a discussion of NGOs in the area of human rights, see David Weissbrodt, “The Contribution of International Nongovernmental Organizations to the Protection of Human Rights,” in Meron, *Human Rights in International Law*, pp. 403–38.

22. Laurie S. Wiseberg and Harry M. Scoble, “Monitoring Human Rights Violations: The Role of Nongovernmental Organizations,” in Donald P. Kommers and Gilbert D. Loescher, eds., *Human Rights and American Foreign Policy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 179–208, and particularly pp. 183–84. These points about the growth and interconnections of international human rights NGOs were also emphasized in interviews with directors and staff of nine key international human rights NGOs.

human rights organizations parallels a more general growth in international NGOs in the postwar period.²³

Domestic NGOs

As opposed to the international NGOs, which work on human rights violations in other countries, domestic NGOs focus on human rights violations in their home countries. Countries and regions differ dramatically in terms of the number and capability of their domestic human rights organizations. Latin America has more domestic human rights NGOs than do other parts of the Third World. A 1981 directory of organizations concerned with human rights and social justice in the developing world discussed 220 such organizations in Latin America, compared with 145 in Asia and 123 in Africa and the Middle East. An updated listing published in 1990 lists over 550 human rights groups in Latin America. Of all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, only Grenada does not have a domestic human rights organization, while some countries have fifty to sixty such groups.²⁴ An international demonstration effect was at work in Latin America during the 1980s as the work and successes of the original human rights organizations in the region inspired others to follow their example.

IGOs

Prior to 1948, no IGO dedicated to the issue of human rights existed. By 1990, twenty-seven organizations included human rights as a significant part of their work.²⁵ These international organizations became the arenas where NGOs came together and a focal point for NGO work. The larger international NGOs have UN consultative status. Such status comprises the formal procedure linking IGOs to international NGOs in the issue-network and allows them to participate in the debates and activities of the UN. Both the UN Commission on Human Rights and the Subcommittee on the Protection of Minorities,

23. Kjell Skjelsbaek, "The Growth of International Nongovernmental Organization in the Twentieth Century," *International Organization* 25 (Summer 1971), pp. 420–42.

24. The sources for the figures are Human Rights Internet, *Human Rights Directory: Latin America, Africa, and Asia*, eds. Laurie S. Wiseberg and Harry M. Scoble (Washington, D.C.: Human Rights Internet, 1981); and Laurie S. Wiseberg, Guadalupe López, and Sarah Meselson, eds., "Human Rights Directory: Latin America and the Caribbean," special issue, *Human Rights Internet Reporter* 13 (January 1990). By domestic group, I refer to groups operating in their home country. Although the definition used by these directories is broader than in many discussions of human rights groups in Latin America, comparison of the 1981 and 1990 figures gives an idea of the dramatic growth in the Latin American human rights network and the wide range of groups working on diverse human rights issues throughout the region.

25. These figures are based on information coded from Union of International Associations, ed., *Yearbook of International Organizations: 1948* (Brussels: Union of International Associations, 1948); and Union of International Associations, ed., *Yearbook of International Organizations: 1990* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1990). They include only organizations and exclude treaties, conventions, and declarations also listed in the yearbooks.

which were set up after World War II, became more dynamic in the 1970s under the influence of the new rules and the pressures of international NGOs, the Carter administration, and some European governments.²⁶ The Human Rights Committee began to function after the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights came into legal force for adhering states in 1976, providing yet another arena for human rights debate and activism in the UN system.²⁷

The IACHR of the Organization of American States (OAS), first established in 1959, was reorganized and strengthened in 1979 when the American Convention on Human Rights entered into force. The reorganized commission was able to play a more important role in the promotion of human rights in the region, especially in its influential 1980 report on human rights in Argentina.²⁸

Foundations and funders

A handful of private and public foundations have been active in funding human rights organizations. The most important U.S.-based foundation for Latin America has been the Ford Foundation, but a number of European funders also have played key roles, especially European church foundations.²⁹ In addition to private foundations, official development assistance agencies in Canada, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and the United States also have funded human rights NGOs.

Prior to 1975, large U.S. foundations hardly ever funded international human rights work.³⁰ From 1977 to 1987, U.S. foundation grants for human rights work grew dramatically, in terms of both the total number and, especially, the absolute dollar amounts of grants. The Ford Foundation accounts for much of this change, but a number of other foundations also redirected their giving toward human rights (see Figure 1). Although not reflected in the figure, European foundations also became increasingly con-

26. Economic and Social Council resolutions 1235 (passed in 1967) and 1503 (passed in 1970), which authorized the commission to review communications and investigate complaints that appear to reveal a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights, fundamentally strengthened the UN human rights machinery.

27. The Covenant for Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights were substantially drafted by 1954 but not approved by the General Assembly and opened for signature until 1966. The two covenants reached the required number of adherents for entry into legal force in 1976.

28. Organization of American States, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina* (Washington, D.C.: OAS General Secretariat, 1980).

29. On the Ford Foundation's international work, see Peter D. Bell, "The Ford Foundation as a Transnational Actor," *International Organization* 25 (Summer 1971), pp. 465–78; and Jeffrey M. Puryear, "Higher Education, Development Assistance, and Repressive Regimes," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 17 (Summer 1982), pp. 3–35.

30. The subject of human rights did not appear in the index of major foundation grants in the United States until 1975; see The Foundation Center, *The Foundation Grants Index* (New York: The Foundation Center, 1975). Before this, a few human rights grants were listed under the subjects of civil rights or social sciences, but these comprised a small portion of total international grants.

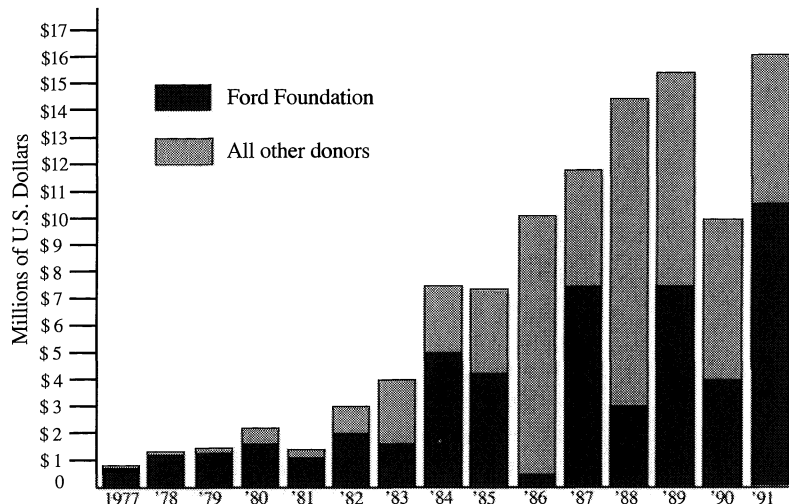


FIGURE 1. *U.S. foundation grants for international human rights work, 1977–91*

Source. The Foundation Center, *The Foundation Grants Index* (New York: The Foundation Center, all editions, 1977–80), and *Dialog*, electronic data base (New York: The Foundation Center, all years, 1981–91). The figures were compiled from all grants listed under the heading of “human rights” and represent the total contributions of U.S.-based foundations for each year indicated.

cerned with human rights.³¹ This change in foundation funding helped support the growth in human rights NGOs in the 1970s and 1980s.

Foundations did not create organizations or networks; they only helped to strengthen existing organizations. Foundations are by nature responsive—they fund proposals from functioning organizations but rarely initiate projects themselves. Nevertheless, the move of a handful of foundations into human rights funding helped human rights organizations sustain themselves, institutionalize, and grow.

Networks and governments

What is the relationship of networks to government policy? In most cases, government human rights policy emerged as a response to network pressure and depended fundamentally on network information. For this reason, it is very difficult to separate the independent influences of government policy and network pressures. Networks often work through governments and other powerful actors to achieve their greatest impact. Government policy bodies

31. The *International Foundation Directory* lists fifteen European foundations with human rights as one of their funding priorities. See H. V. Hodson, ed., *The International Foundation Directory 1991*, 5th ed. (London: Europa Publications, 1991).

provide arenas and points of leverage for the work of the network.³² For example, in the United States, the earliest governmental group to work actively on human rights was the House Subcommittee on International Organizations under the chairmanship of Donald Fraser, later renamed the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations. Beginning in 1973, this subcommittee held a series of hearings on human rights abuses around the world that put it in contact with many human rights advocates in the network.³³ The primary witnesses providing human rights data and information in these hearings were the representatives of human rights NGOs. In its initial years, the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs of the U.S. State Department, formed during the Carter administration, maintained close contacts with and sought out the information of NGOs. In European countries, points of influence within the state centered on Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation. In some cases, European governments institutionalized the links with other parts of the network. Both the Dutch and the Norwegian executives, for example, initiated human rights advisory committees, which incorporated NGOs such as AI, ministries, parliamentarians, and scholars.³⁴

Often the interactions between the network and bureaucratic groups within governments were mutually reinforcing but not congenial. The U.S. annual human rights reports provide a clear example of that interaction. Because State Department officials did not want to offend foreign officials or undermine other policy goals, their early human rights reports were often weak. However, the State Department reports did serve as a focal point for human rights groups, which were able to create annual public events by issuing responses to the reports.³⁵ The reports and counterreports attracted press coverage on human rights, and the critiques of the State Department reports held the department up to higher standards in its future reporting. Domestic human rights organizations in repressive countries in turn learned that they could indirectly pressure their governments to change practices by providing information on human rights abuses to human rights officers in U.S. embassies for inclusion in the U.S. annual country-specific reports.

32. This point about network leverage on more powerful actors was first developed by Margaret Keck and is elaborated in further detail in Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Issue Networks in the Environment and Human Rights," paper presented at the 17th congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Los Angeles, 24–27 September 1992.

33. Interview with John Salzberg, former special consultant on human rights to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., April 1991. Although the committee has been less active under subsequent chairpersons, it has continued to hold hearings on human rights abuses in countries around the world.

34. Jan Egeland, *Impotent Superpower–Potent Small State: Potentials and Limitations of Human Rights Objectives in the Foreign Policies of the U.S. and Norway* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1988), p. 193, fn.

35. See, for example, Human Rights Watch and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Critique: Review of the Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1987* (New York: Human Rights Watch and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, June 1988).

The link to government is simultaneously the most powerful and the least dependable aspect of the work of the issue-network. The effectiveness of the network often depends on engaging support from governments. When network contacts with a government are informal and not institutionalized through NGO advisory committees, changing personnel can block access between the network and the government.

The section above documents dramatic growth in each of the parts of the human rights network in the 1970s and 1980s. This growth alone poses problems to state sovereignty, since each new human rights organization embodies a reconceptualized view of state sovereignty whereby international scrutiny of domestic human rights practices is not only legitimate but also necessary. To demonstrate the impact of the network in practice, however, we need to look at the effectiveness of these pressures in specific cases.

Argentina

Even before the military coup of March 1976, international human rights pressures already influenced the Argentine military's very decision to use the practice of so-called disappearing their perceived political opponents rather than imprisoning them or executing them publicly.³⁶ The Argentine military believed they had learned from the international reaction to the human rights abuses that occurred after the Chilean coup. When the Chilean military initially executed and imprisoned large numbers of people, the uproar led to the international isolation of the Pinochet regime. The Argentine military decided instead to secretly kidnap, detain, and execute its victims, while denying any knowledge of their whereabouts. By this means, the military hoped to diffuse international condemnation and maintain a moderate international image.³⁷

Although this method initially succeeded in muting the international response to the coup, human rights groups eventually were able to document

36. This section draws upon some material from an earlier work; see Martin and Sikkink, "U.S. Policy and Human Rights in Argentina and Guatemala, 1973–1980."

37. Mignone recalls, "One phrase I heard repeatedly in that period from the mouths of Generals, Colonels, Admirals, and Brigadiers was, 'we aren't going to do it like Franco and Pinochet who executed people publicly, because then even the Pope will be asking us not to do it.' " See Emilio Mignone, *Derechos humanos y sociedad: el caso argentino* (Human rights and society: the Argentine case) (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional and Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, 1991), p. 66. This process of perverse learning is also discussed in Claudio Uriarte, *Almirante Cero: Biografía No Autorizada de Emilio Eduardo Massera* (Admiral Zero: The unauthorized biography of Emilio Eduardo Massera) (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1992), p. 97; and in Carlos H. Acuña and Catalina Smulovitz, "Ajustando las FF.AA. a la Democracia: Éxitos, Fracasos, y Ambigüidades de las Experiencias del Cono Sur" (Adjusting the armed forces to democracy: Successes, failures, and ambiguities of the experiences of the southern cone), paper presented at a workshop on human rights, justice, and society in Latin America, organized by the Social Science Research Council, Buenos Aires, 22–24 October 1992, p. 4.

and condemn the new forms of repressive practices. AI and groups staffed by Argentine political exiles first brought the human rights situation in Argentina to world attention after the coup in 1976. To counteract the rising tide of international public criticism, the Argentine junta decided to invite AI for an on-site visit in 1976. In March 1977, on the first anniversary of the military coup, AI published the report on its visit, a well-documented denunciation of the abuses of the regime with emphasis on the problem of the disappeared. AI estimated that the regime had taken six thousand political prisoners, most without charges, and had abducted between two thousand and ten thousand people. The AI report helped demonstrate that the disappearances were part of a concerted government policy by which the military and the police kidnapped perceived opponents, took them to secret detention centers where they tortured, interrogated, and killed them, and secretly disposed of their bodies.³⁸ When AI won the Nobel Peace Prize later that same year, its reputation was enhanced, further legitimizing its denunciations of the Argentine regime.

In response to increasing dissemination of information on human rights abuses in Argentina, a number of governments, most notably the Carter administration but also the French and Swedish governments, denounced the rights violations of the Argentine junta. Although the Argentine government claimed that such statements constituted unacceptable interventions in their internal affairs and a violation of Argentine sovereignty, the actions of U.S. and European officials indicate that they did not accept Argentine claims. In 1977, the U.S. government reduced the planned level of military aid for Argentina due to human rights abuses. Later, Congress passed a bill eliminating all military assistance to Argentina, which went into effect on 30 September 1978.³⁹ A number of high-level U.S. delegations met with the junta members during this period to discuss human rights.

Early U.S. action on Argentina was based primarily on the human rights documentation provided by AI and other NGOs, not on information received through the embassy or the State Department.⁴⁰ For example, during a 1977 visit, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance carried a list of disappeared people to present to members of the Argentine junta. The list had been prepared by

38. Amnesty International, *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Argentina* (London: Amnesty International Publications, March 1977).

39. Congressional Research Service, Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Assistance: Experiences and Issues in Policy Implementation (1977–1978)*, report prepared for U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 96th Congress, 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, November, 1979), p. 106.

40. After the coup in 1976, Argentine political exiles set up branches of the Argentine Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Mexico City, Paris, Rome, and Washington, D.C. Two of its members testified on human rights abuses in Argentina during hearings in the U.S. House Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organization in October 1976. See Iain Guest, *Behind the Disappearances: Argentina's Dirty War Against Human Rights and the United Nations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 66–67.

human rights NGOs in the United States.⁴¹ When Assistant Secretary of State for Humanitarian Affairs and Human Rights Patricia Derian met with Admiral Emilio Massera, a member of the Argentine junta, during a visit in 1977, she discussed use of torture by the navy. When Massera denied such practices, Derian told him that she had seen a rudimentary map of a secret detention center in the Navy Mechanical School where the meeting was being held. She asked him whether it was possible that under their feet someone was being tortured. One of Derian's key sources of information was NGOs, especially the families of the disappeared, with whom she met frequently during her visits to Buenos Aires.⁴²

By 1977–78, domestic human rights organizations within Argentina began to form and develop significant external contacts. Members of domestic human rights organizations like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights traveled frequently to the United States and to Europe, where they met with human rights organizations, talked to the press, and met with parliamentarians and government officials. These groups sought external contacts to publicize the human rights situation, to fund their activities, and to help protect themselves against further repression by their government. They were a crucial link in providing documentation and information to spur the interests and concern of U.S. and European policymakers. Much of the funding for domestic human rights organizations in Argentina came from European and U.S.-based foundations.⁴³

If we examine some key events that served to keep the case of Argentine human rights in the minds of U.S. and European policymakers, the impact of these transnational linkages on policy becomes apparent. In 1979, the Argentine authorities released Jacobo Timerman, whose powerful memoir detailing his disappearance and torture by the Argentine military had an important impact on U.S. policymakers.⁴⁴ Human rights organizations, members of the U.S. Jewish community, and U.S. journalists helped make Timerman's case a

41. Interview with Robert Pastor, former director of Latin American Affairs, National Security Council, 1977–81, Wianno, Mass., 28 June 1990.

42. Testimony given by Patricia Derian to the National Criminal Appeals Court in Buenos Aires during the trials of junta members: "Massera sonrió y me dijo: 'Sabe qué pasó con Poncio Pilatos?' " ("Massera smiled at me and said, 'Do you know what happened to Pontius Pilate?' ") See *Diario del Juicio*, 18 June 1985, p. 3, and Guest, *Behind the Disappearances*, pp. 161–63. Later the report of the Argentine National Commission of the Disappeared confirmed that the Navy Mechanical School was one of the more notorious secret torture and detention centers; see *Nunca Mas: The Report of the Argentine National Commission for the Disappeared* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986), pp. 79–84.

43. For example, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo received grants from Dutch churches and the Norwegian Parliament, and the Ford Foundation provided funds for the Center for Legal and Social Studies and the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo).

44. Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without A Number* (New York: Random House, 1981).

cause célèbre in U.S. policy circles. In 1980, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Argentine human rights activist Adolfo Perez Esquivel. Peace and human rights groups in the United States and Europe helped sponsor Perez Esquivel's speaking tour to the United States exactly at the same time that the OAS was considering the IACHR report on Argentina and the U.S. Congress was considering the end of the arms embargo to Argentina.

The Argentine military government was extremely concerned about international human rights condemnations and pressures. It adopted a series of varying responses to international pressures, each roughly corresponding to a different stage on the continuum of the erosion of sovereignty. They first tried to deny the legitimacy of international concern over human rights in Argentina, to discredit the human rights network by suggesting its members were part of a subversive anti-Argentine campaign, and to mobilize nationalist public opinion against what it defined as interference in internal affairs. When that approach was unable to still international protest, the junta tried to placate international and domestic opposition by cooperating with some parts of the network while at the same time continuing many repressive practices. The third stage involved making concrete improvements in repressive practices in response to international and domestic pressures. Although these stages progressed in a roughly chronological manner, there was continual overlap and backtracking, in part because the Argentine military government was not a unitary actor but a coalition of different factions with different attitudes about the proper response to international pressures.

From 1976 to 1978, the Argentine military pursued the first strategy of denying the legitimacy of international concern over human rights in Argentina. At the same time, it took actions that appear to contradict this strategy, like permitting the visit of the AI mission to Argentina in 1976. The failure of the AI visit, from the military point of view, appeared to reaffirm the strategy of resistance and denial of human rights pressures. This strategy was most obvious at the UN, where the Argentine government tried every means to silence international condemnation in the UN Commission on Human Rights. Ironically the rabidly anticommunist Argentine regime found a diplomatic ally in the Soviet Union, an important trading partner for Argentine wheat, and the two countries worked together to block UN consideration of the Argentine human rights situation.⁴⁵ Concerned states circumvented this blockage by creating the UN Working Group on Disappearances in 1980 to draw attention to the practice of disappearances in Argentina and elsewhere in the world. Human rights NGOs contributed to the debates over human rights at the United Nations, providing information, lobbying government delegations, and pursuing joint strategies with sympathetic delegations.

By 1978, however, the Argentine government recognized that the greatest weakness of its regime was the "international variable" and that something had

45. Guest, *Behind the Disappearances*, pp. 118–19 and 182–83.

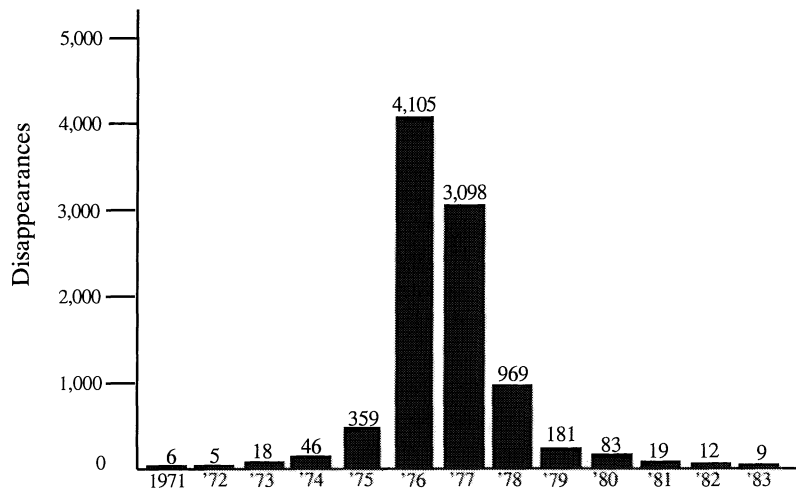


FIGURE 2. *Number of disappearances in Argentina, 1971–83*

Source. Annex to the report *Nunca Mas* (Never again), published by the National Commission on Disappeared People, 1984.

to be done to improve its international image, particularly in the United States and Europe, and to restore military and economic aid flows.⁴⁶ To confront this situation, the Argentine government decided to invite the IACHR for an on-site visit to Argentina, in exchange for a U.S. commitment to release Export-Import Bank funds and improve U.S.–Argentine relations.⁴⁷ In 1978, the human rights situation in Argentina improved significantly; especially noteworthy was the decline in the practice of involuntary disappearance for which the Argentine regime had gained international notoriety. Figure 2 shows that although the number of disappearances reached a peak in 1976, the practice of disappearance as a tool of state policy was not curtailed until after 1978, when international pressures became more intense and the government began to take the international variable seriously.⁴⁸

The Argentine military government thus moved along the continuum from initial rejection of international human rights interventions to cosmetic

46. *Carta Política*, a news magazine considered to be very close to the military government, commented in August 1978 that international pressures on Argentina continued to increase, citing the examples of the denial of Export-Import Bank credits to Argentina for human rights reasons and the U.S. military aid ban, and concluded that “the principal problem facing the Argentine State has now become the international siege (*cerco internacional*).” See “Cuadro de Situación” (Description of the Situation), *Carta Política*, no. 57, August 1978, p. 8.

47. Interviews with former Vice President Walter Mondale, Minneapolis, Minn., 20 June 1989, and Ricardo Yofre, former political advisor to President Jorge Videla, Buenos Aires, 1 August 1990.

48. See Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos, *Las Cifras de la Guerra Sucia* (The numbers of the dirty war) (Buenos Aires: Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos, August 1988), pp. 26–32.

cooperation with the human rights network, and eventually to concrete improvements in its human rights practices in response to international pressures. Once it had invited the Inter-American commission and discovered that the commission could not be co-opted or confused, the government moved to end the practice of disappearance, to release political prisoners, and to restore some semblance of political participation. Full restoration of human rights in Argentina did not come until after the Malvinas/Falklands War and the transition to democracy in 1983, but after 1980 the worst abuses had been curtailed.

Mexico

The political and human rights situation in Mexico was quite different than that in Argentina. Mexico had an elected civilian government that had been under the control of the official political party, the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI) since the party was formed in 1929. Although massive abuses of the kind that occurred in Argentina after the coup were not the case in Mexico, endemic human rights abuses were common.

The most serious episode of human rights violations in Mexico occurred in October 1968, when army troops opened fire on a peaceful student demonstration in one of the central plazas in Mexico City. The government officially admitted forty-three deaths, but knowledgeable observers suggest that at least three hundred to five hundred people were killed, over two thousand were wounded, and fifteen hundred to two thousand people were taken prisoner.⁴⁹

Surprisingly, the massacre attracted very little international condemnation or attention. The International Olympic Committee, which was to hold the Olympic Games in Mexico City only ten days later, confirmed that the games would go on as planned. Aside from student demonstrations of solidarity in a number of cities, a telegram from PEN Club International protesting the arrest of various authors, and a telegram from a group of French intellectuals, there was no international condemnation of the Mexican government's action.⁵⁰ Why did this event, a 1968 version of China's 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, not inspire an international response? One key part of the answer to this question is that the international human rights network, and the human rights consciousness and practices that it created, did not yet exist in 1968. AI later adopted as prisoners of conscience some of the political prisoners who

49. These figures are taken from Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 669; from Amnesty International, *Annual Report 1968–69* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1969), p. 12; and from interviews with Mexican human rights activists.

50. Ramón Ramírez, *El Movimiento Estudiantil de México: Julio–Diciembre 1968*, Tomo 2, *Documentos* (The Mexican student movement: July–December 1968, vol. 2, Documents) (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1969).

remained in jail after the massacre, but AI was at that time a small organization without the resources to document or report on the massacre or to issue urgent actions, as it would today. Few of the other groups that would later become part of the network even existed. Because there was no credible independent source of human rights information, the Mexican government was able to control information about the event, and the government's low casualty figures were almost universally accepted.⁵¹

The Mexican government argued that its internal affairs were not legitimate concerns of other countries.⁵² The Argentine military used the same argument eight years later; but in 1969, the argument that human rights practices were legitimately within the domestic jurisdiction of a state was much more accepted by the international community than the same argument was in 1977.

Although an episode with violations of this magnitude did not recur in Mexico, human rights abuses in Mexico continued during the 1970s and 1980s. According to Mexican human rights organizations, approximately five hundred people disappeared in Mexico in the 1970s, many in the context of a counterinsurgency campaign.⁵³ Torture was routinely used to extract confessions from both common and political prisoners, prison conditions were often abysmal, and electoral fraud and press censorship were commonplace.⁵⁴ In spite of this record, virtually no international attention was directed to the Mexican human rights situation in the 1970s and early 1980s. The international human rights network had come into existence by the mid-1970s, and yet it did not turn its attention to Mexico. The more serious violations in Central America and the Southern Cone occupied all the attention of the network. The existence of a civilian elected government, Mexico's progressive stance on international human rights (it became, for example, a haven for political refugees from Pinochet's Chile and later a firm critic of human rights violations

51. *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Newsweek* referred to deaths ranging from twenty to forty-nine people and from approximately one hundred to five hundred wounded, which reflected the government figures. See Paul L. Montgomery, "Deaths Put at 49 in Mexican Clash," *The New York Times*, 4 October 1969, p. A1; Gladys Delmas, "Troops' Show of Force Stuns Mexicans," *Washington Post*, 4 October 1968, p. A3; and "Mexico: Night of Sadness," *Newsweek*, 14 October 1968, pp. 45–48. Because the dead and wounded were taken to the military hospital, which was closed to reporters, it was difficult to get independent estimates of deaths.

52. At the Conference of the Mexico–United States Interparliamentary Group, held five months after the massacre, the chairperson of the Mexican delegation stated: "Mexico affirms that no State has the right to intervene for whatever reason, directly or indirectly, in the affairs of another State." See address by Deputy Luis Farías, chairman of the Mexican Delegation to the Mexico–United States Interparliamentary Group, in *Report of the Ninth Conference of the Mexico–United States Interparliamentary Group, Aguascalientes, Mexico, April 1969* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 8.

53. Committee in Defense of Prisoners, the Persecuted, Disappeared Persons, and Political Exiles, "Diez Años de Lucha por la Libertad" (Ten years of struggle for freedom), as cited in Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Mexico: A Policy of Impunity* (New York: Human Rights Watch, June 1990), p. 35.

54. Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Mexico*, p. 1.

in El Salvador), and the absence of Mexican human rights organizations kept Mexico from becoming a concern of the network.

Mexico had taken a position of firm rhetorical support for the human rights efforts of international organizations and cultivated its image as a defender of human rights. In 1988, the Mexican delegate to the UN Human Rights Commission affirmed, "Our country's adhesion to the most important multilateral human rights instruments entails a permanent double commitment: to preserve their full protection internally, and to contribute to their observance in the world within the judicial framework that the international community has established." He went on to clarify, however, that the UN mandate was to look into only massive and systematic violations of rights where domestic legal recourse is inoperative.⁵⁵ Mexico's verbal support for international human rights norms and its acceptance of the international community's role in the supervision of human rights practices were coupled with a failure to address a pattern of domestic human rights violations.

This situation began to change by the late 1980s, when human rights consciousness began to penetrate Mexican civil society. In 1984, only four human rights NGOs existed in Mexico, seven years later there were sixty, and by 1993 there were over two hundred independent human rights monitoring and advocacy NGOs. International attention helped create the political space within which this growth was possible.⁵⁶ A key turning point came when a group of prestigious Mexican intellectuals, activists, and politicians set up the Mexican Academy for Human Rights in 1984. The academy focused attention on human rights issues in Mexico, trained human rights practitioners, and fostered research and education on human rights. The academy was explicitly designed as an academic institution rather than an activist group, in hope of opening space for the human rights debate in Mexico without confronting the government on specific issues.⁵⁷ The academy received early and strong support from the Ford Foundation, which provided the bulk of its funding during its first five years.⁵⁸ The 1985 earthquake in Mexico City gave impetus to the increasing concern with human rights. The discovery of the bodies of several prisoners showing signs of torture during the excavation of the ruins of the headquarters of the office of the Federal District Attorney General stirred national outrage.⁵⁹ Second, when the Mexican government was paralyzed in its response to the earthquake, civil society organized and international NGOs

55. "Statement by the Chief of the Mexican Delegation, Mr. Claude Heller, on theme 12 of the agenda in the 44th period of session of the Commission of Human Rights," mimeograph, Commission of Human Rights, Geneva, 8 March 1988 (translation by author).

56. Jonathan Fox and Luis Hernández, "Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government," *Alternatives* 17 (Spring 1992), pp. 184–85; and Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch World Report* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993), p. 131.

57. Interview with Rodolfo Stavenhagen, founding member of the Mexican Academy of Human Rights, Buenos Aires, 26 October 1992.

58. This included an initial two-year grant of \$150,000 and a follow-up grant of \$375,000.

59. Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Mexico*, pp. 9–10.

and funders stepped in to clean up. This collaboration between groups in civil society and international NGOs broke down old assumptions in Mexico that all political activity must be channeled through the state and created new confidence in the capacity of the NGO sector.⁶⁰

A third stage began when the international human rights NGOs first addressed the Mexican human rights situation. With the wave of redemocratization in the hemisphere, human rights had improved in many countries that previously had been targets of the network. The network was now able to turn its attention to the more ambiguous situations of endemic violations of human rights under formally elected governments. The first reports by an international human rights NGO came in 1984 and 1986 when Americas Watch released a report on Mexico's treatment of Guatemalan refugees and AI issued its report on rural violence in Mexico.⁶¹ When AI researchers first visited Mexico, they found no human rights official in the government or human rights NGO to contact. Although the two reports upset the Mexican government because they breached its cultivated image and identity as a defender of human rights, they did not lead to changing government human rights practices.⁶²

Human rights practices did not improve until after 1988, when a different domestic and international political context made human rights a more salient issue. The split of the ruling party, PRI, before the 1988 presidential election led to the formation of a potent political challenge from the left in the form of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. In 1990, Mexico initiated discussions with Canada and the United States over a free trade agreement. Both of these situations made the Mexican government more sensitive to charges of human rights violations.

Americas Watch issued a seminal report on human rights conditions in Mexico in 1990. The introduction to this report begins: "More often than not, Mexico is overlooked when lists of countries that violate internationally recognized human rights are compiled. That this is so is more a testament to the Mexican government's careful cultivation of its pro-human rights image than its care to ensure that individual human rights are respected."⁶³ The report goes on to document killings, torture, and mistreatment of individuals by the police during criminal investigations; disappearances; election-related violence; violence related to land disputes; abuses directed against independent unions; and violations of freedom of the press—abuses that the report argues have been prevalent for years, and have become an institutionalized part of Mexican society. The Americas Watch report received coverage in the

60. Interviews with Rodolfo Stavenhagen, 26 October 1992, and with Christopher Welna, former program officer, Ford Foundation office for Mexico and Central America, 8 October 1992.

61. See Americas Watch, *Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico: 1980–1984* (New York: Human Rights Watch, September 1984); and Amnesty International, *Mexico: Human Rights in Rural Areas* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1986), respectively.

62. Interview with Sebastian Brett, Amnesty International researcher on Mexico, 1983–1987, Santiago, Chile, 3 November 1992.

63. Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Mexico*, p. 1.

U.S. and Mexican press and attracted significant attention in Washington, D.C., where the initial negotiations for the free trade agreement were under way.

Until 1990, the U.S. Congress had held no hearings on the general human rights situation in Mexico. Over the years, Congress had expressed concern about the mistreatment of U.S. prisoners held in Mexican prisons but had not broadened its focus to look at Mexico's treatment of its own citizens. Yet in September 1990, only a few months after the Americas Watch report was issued, the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations and the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs of the House of Representatives held hearings on human rights in Mexico. In addition to testimony from the State Department, these two subcommittees heard testimony from AI and Americas Watch.⁶⁴

The IACHR did not consider admissible any Mexican cases until 1989–90, when it took on three Mexican cases. All three cases, brought by members of a major opposition party, the National Action Party (PAN), allege that PRI committed electoral irregularities. In response to these cases, the Mexican government adopted a rigid position that a decision of a domestic electoral body “is not and cannot be subject to international jurisdiction” and that if a “State agreed to submit itself to international jurisdiction with respect to the election of its political bodies, a *State would cease to be sovereign*” and finally that “any conclusion issued by the Commission on the legitimacy of the electoral process . . . would constitute an act of intervention, according to the definition set forth in Article 18 of the Charter.”⁶⁵

The IACHR responded to each of these claims, asserting the admissibility of the complaints and the competence of the commission to decide issues related to elections, since the American Convention on Human Rights guarantees the right to vote and be elected. The commission turned to various sources to interpret the claims of the Mexican government about its sovereign rights: the understandings embodied in the human rights treaties, the Mexican government's ratification of these treaties, its failure to express reservations at that point with regard to the issue of elections, and the shared understandings and practices of other states in the region as indicated by their statements or lack thereof. The commission concluded that the Mexican position was unfounded, and it recommended that the Mexican government reform its internal electoral law to make effective the political rights of the convention.⁶⁶ This episode

64. U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Current Developments in Mexico: Hearing Before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations and on Western Hemisphere Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 12 September 1990*, 101st Congress, 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), pp. 1–97.

65. OAS, *Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1989–1990* (Washington, D.C.: OAS General Secretariat, 1990), pp. 103–5, emphasis added.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–23.

underscores the importance of sovereignty as a set of shared understandings and practices and the manner in which the previous actions of a state create precedents that constrain its later actions and statements. In spite of its protestations, the Mexican government is currently reformulating its electoral laws.

In large part as a response to these international network pressures, the Mexican government created the National Commission on Human Rights in June 1990.⁶⁷ The Salinas administration was concerned that Mexico might be subject to heightened scrutiny from both the U.S. administration and Congress in the context of future free trade negotiations and subsequent ratification debates.⁶⁸ Creating the National Commission on Human Rights served preemptively to defuse the issue by making it appear that the Mexican government had its human rights problem under control.

That Mexico's national commission is a response to international pressure is underscored by the timing of its creation and the fact that its reports are now published simultaneously in Spanish and English and shipped via international express mail to representatives of key U.S. human rights organizations. Three events converged shortly before the creation of the national commission. A leading human rights activist, Norma Corona Sapien, was murdered on 21 May 1990 after spearheading an investigation that concluded that Federal Judicial Police were responsible for earlier killings. In May 1990 as well, the IACHR issued its decision finding Mexico in violation of the OAS American Convention on Human Rights. The final pressure came in early June of that year when Americas Watch issued its own report, *Human Rights in Mexico: A Policy of Impunity*, just days before Salinas and President Bush were scheduled to announce their intention to begin negotiations for a free trade agreement between their countries. Concerned with preempting negative publicity about Mexican human rights practices, four days before the meeting with Bush, President Salinas established the National Human Rights Commission.⁶⁹

Although it was headed by a prestigious Mexican jurist, Dr. Jorge Carpizo, and has a strong presence of members from the Academy of Human Rights, the commission has been criticized for lacking sufficient independence from the government to serve as a watchdog agency. There is some concern that the

67. Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán, Rafael Ruiz Harrell, and José Barragán, *La Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos: Una visión no gubernamental* (The National Human Rights Commission: A nongovernmental view) (Mexico City: Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, 1992), p. 1.

68. According to Dresser, "Foremost among the priorities of Salinas's foreign policy is the avoidance of diplomatic conflicts that might sabotage Mexico's shared economic interests with the U.S." See Denise Dresser, "Mr. Salinas Goes to Washington: Mexican Lobbying in the United States," conference paper no. 62, presented at a research conference entitled "Crossing National Borders: Invasion or Involvement," Columbia University, New York, 6 December 1991, p. 5.

69. Ellen L. Lutz, "Human Rights in Mexico: Cause for Continuing Concern," *Current History* 92 (February 1993), pp. 78–82.

purpose of the commission is to provide a mask for international public opinion.⁷⁰ Evidence suggests, however, that in many cases the national commission has been an effective advocate for human rights.⁷¹ Since the formation of the national commission, the government has taken several concrete steps to improve human rights practices. It has taken measures to professionalize the Federal Judicial Police and has approved procedures to prevent the use of evidence from confessions in trials, which had led to routine use of torture during interrogation after arrests.⁷² Also, the National Human Rights Commission has investigated and condemned conditions in some of the country's worst prisons.⁷³

One alternative explanation for the changes in Mexico is to attribute them to the will of the administration of President Salinas, since all of the changes mentioned occurred after he came to power. Evidence suggests that the Salinas administration, in the absence of human rights pressures, would have been unlikely to have made these changes on its own. For example, shortly after the Salinas administration took office, the mayor of the Federal District (Mexico City) appointed as the director of intelligence services of Mexico City a man with a reputation as a torturer and founder of a death squad, Miguel Nazar Haro. Because the President appoints the mayor, Nazar Haro could not have been named without Salinas's awareness. Yet, it was not until a major campaign was mounted domestically calling for Nazar Haro's resignation that he was given a so-called leave of absence.⁷⁴

There is no doubt, however, that Salinas is extremely sensitive to his country's external image and to the international repercussions of human rights complaints. More than many leaders, Salinas often takes preemptive measures to project the image of his administration's concern with human rights. For example, in late 1992, less than one week before he was to meet with President-elect Bill Clinton, Salinas named Dr. Carpizo, the former Supreme Court Justice who was the president of the National Commission for Human Rights, as his new Attorney General.

The case of Mexico provides three separate historical stages, each of which provides some evidence for the argument presented here. During the first stage, in 1968–69, an episode of serious violations of human rights provoked no international response because the international human rights network did not yet exist. During the second stage, from 1970 to 1988, lower-level endemic

70. Emilio Krieger, "Prólogo" (Prologue), in Sierra Guzmán et al., *La Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos* (The National Human Rights Commission), p. ix.

71. Lutz discusses the national commission's "hard-hitting recommendations in over 300 cases," many of which included cases that have been the focus of NGOs. See Lutz, "Human Rights in Mexico," p. 80.

72. "Mexico: Human Rights Come to the Fore," *Latin America Update*, vol. 16, no. 1, Washington Office on Latin America, January–April 1991, pp. 1 and 6.

73. Americas Watch, *Prison Conditions in Mexico* (New York: Human Rights Watch, March 1991), p. 46.

74. Mexican Academy for Human Rights, *Boletín 5* (February 1989), p. 12.

human rights abuses continued. Although the human rights network emerged during this period, it did not turn its attention to Mexico, and there was no condemnation of these practices or substantial change in the human rights situation. In the third stage, from 1988 to 1992, the international human rights network began to focus on Mexico, in collaboration with recently formed domestic human rights groups, and provoked a relatively rapid and forceful response from the Mexican government.⁷⁵

Conclusions

This article has argued that in some cases international human rights pressures contribute to changing understandings about how states should use their sovereign authority over their citizens and to changing specific human rights practices. Although two cases are not sufficient to confirm this argument, the contrast provides substantiation for it and indicates it is worth further study.⁷⁶ There are other cases in which the international human rights network has not been effective in changing understandings or practices about human rights: in Latin America (for example, Haiti and Guatemala) and elsewhere (for example, Cambodia and China).⁷⁷ The central question then becomes: under what conditions can the international human rights network be effective? The cases here offer some evidence of these conditions.

In both Argentina and Mexico, nongovernmental actors initiated global concern with human rights violations and documented the abuses. Later, when international and regional organizations produced reports, their efforts were aided by earlier reports formulated by NGOs. NGOs also provided the information that served as the basis for governmental human rights policy. Because domestic human rights NGOs are a crucial link in the network, where these groups are absent, as in the case of Mexico initially, international human rights work is severely hampered. Since the human rights network has been strongest in regard to Latin America and to Eastern Europe and the former

75. One recent work gives international pressures little credit for promoting democracy in Mexico. This work was based on research that ended in 1989, however, and was not able to observe and comment on the international pressures and domestic changes in the 1989–92 period that are the basis of the argument presented here. See Lorenzo Meyer, “Mexico: The Exception and the Rule,” in Abraham F. Lowenthal, ed., *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America—Case Studies* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 93–110.

76. Cases similar to Argentina could be made for some of the other military dictatorships of the Southern Cone, such as Chile and Uruguay. Mexico is unique, both for the lack of attention it received on human rights issues initially and for the rapidity of its response once human rights issues became salient, but there are other cases of semidemocratic governments where targeted international human rights pressures have led to important changes—for example, in the Dominican Republic during the 1978 elections or more recently in Paraguay.

77. Even Guatemala has moved along the continuum from uncompromising rejection of all human rights pressures as illegitimate interferences in sovereignty to a middle position of accepting the legitimacy of international criticism but claiming that it is not responsible and cannot control most of the violence.

Soviet Union, the most forceful human rights work has been directed at violations in these regions.

One possible alternative explanation is that foreign government pressure and domestic political pressure would have been able to change human rights practices without the involvement of the issue-network. What this misses is that foreign governments placed pressure on human rights violators only after nongovernmental actors had identified, documented, and denounced human rights violations and had pressured foreign governments to become involved.

Because of the hidden nature of repression in Argentina and the able and active diplomatic strategies of the Argentine junta, it is unlikely that the true nature of human rights abuses in Argentina would have come to world attention without the detailed documentation and diffusion of information by the human rights network. Unlike the case of Chile, where television crews and embassy officials could attest to the scale of rights violations, the Argentine government's responsibility for the practice of disappearances was revealed only through an intense labor of many parts of the network working collectively. The reports of human rights organizations provided the definitive evidence necessary to mount the international human rights campaign against the Argentine military. Without this information, foreign governments would not have been able to bring diplomatic pressure to bear on the Argentine government. The first strong pressures from foreign governments came almost a year after the coup and after the release of the powerful AI document detailing the Argentine government's responsibility for the practice of disappearances.

The case of Mexico is even clearer because endemic human rights abuses persisted for almost two decades without any pressure or comments from foreign governments. The Mexican case shows the human rights scenario both when the network did not exist and later, before the network turned its attention to a case. When the network did not exist, there was virtually no international response to the 1968 student massacre. When the network existed but did not focus on Mexico, there was no international awareness of the human rights situation in Mexico. It was only after the NGOs within and outside of Mexico began to document human rights abuses and bring them to the attention of the press and policymakers, and only within the context of the free trade negotiations, that the Mexican government made concrete changes to improve its human rights practices.

The existence of the network and a network decision to focus on a particular country are necessary but obviously not sufficient conditions for changing human rights practices. Many argue that human rights pressures would not be effective against strong states that can raise significant costs to the states that pressure them. Network activists admit that they have been less effective against states perceived as too important to the national security interests of

superpowers: countries such as China, Israel, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.⁷⁸

However, supplementing the argument here with a standard international power argument partly misses the point. In Latin America, the countries that have resisted international human rights pressures, such as Haiti and Guatemala, are considerably weaker than such countries as Argentina and Mexico, which have responded to outside pressures. In the realm of human rights, it is the combination of moral pressure and material pressure that leads to change. Transforming state practices has come about as a result of linking principled ideas to material goals: military aid, economic aid, and trade benefits. But significant material pressure may be ineffective when leaders are unconcerned with the normative message. Countries most susceptible to network pressures, which primarily involve providing information to mobilize moral outrage and shame, are those that aspire to form part of the community of nations as a normative community. Pressures are eventually most effective where states have internalized the norms of the human rights regime and resist being characterized as pariahs.

But human rights does not represent a simple dichotomy of norms versus interests. The networks were influential within states because they contributed to a reformulation in the understandings of national interest at times when traditional understandings of sovereignty and national interest were called into question by changing global events. In the process of foreign policymaking, especially during a period of profound global flux, policymakers are often uncertain not only about what constitutes the national interest but also about how it can be promoted.⁷⁹ Issue-networks served effectively as carriers of human rights ideas, inserting them into the policy debate at the crucial moments when policymakers were questioning past policy models.

A realist approach to international relations would have trouble accounting for the activities of the network and the adoption and implementation of state human rights policies except by dismissing them as insignificant. Realism offers no convincing explanation for why relatively weak nonstate actors could have an impact on state policy or why states would concern themselves with the internal human rights practices of other states, especially when such concern interferes with the pursuit of other state goals. For example, the U.S. government's pressure on Argentina regarding human rights issues led to Argentine defection from the grain embargo of the Soviet Union. Raising human rights issues with Mexico could potentially undermine the successful

78. Interview with Michael Posner, executive director, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, New York, 19 March 1992.

79. Theories of epistemic communities also have stressed the importance of these communities to the policy process in conditions of uncertainty. See Peter Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46 (Winter 1992), pp. 1–35, and pp. 12–16 in particular.

completion of the free trade agreement and cooperation with Mexico on antidrug operations. Human rights pressures are not without costs, even in the strategically less important countries of Latin America.

In liberal versions of international relations theory, cooperation results when states and nonstate actors face problems they cannot resolve individually and from which joint gains are possible or mutually undesirable outcomes are avoided. These situations have been characterized as cooperation or coordination games with particular payoff structures.⁸⁰ The human rights issue, however, cannot be easily characterized in this way. First, the situation does not fit the standard view of a cooperation or coordination game. In most cases, the internal human rights practices of states can be ignored by other states without causing undesirable economic or security externalities.

In the issue of human rights, it is primarily principled ideas that drive changes and cooperation. We cannot understand why countries, organizations, and individuals are concerned about human rights or why countries respond to human rights pressures without taking into account the role of norms and ideas in international life. Jack Donnelly has argued that such moral interests are no less real than material interests and that a sense of moral interdependence has led to the emergence of human rights regimes.⁸¹

In this sense, the work here fits into a new literature trying to specify the influence of ideas and normative change on international relations and foreign and domestic policy changes.⁸² This literature, however, continues to be vague on how ideas and norms specifically influence international relations. What are the processes and mechanisms through which ideas come to influence state policies and practices? What has been lacking is a means to conceptualize these emerging actors who are contributing to transformed understandings of sovereignty. In the case of human rights, I conclude that the primary movers behind this form of principled international action are international networks. Similar cases could be made for other issue-areas wherein shared values play a

80. See, for example, Arthur A. Stein, "Coordination and Collaboration: Regimes in an Anarchic World," *International Organization* 36 (Spring 1982), pp. 299–324.

81. Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, pp. 211–12.

82. See, for example, Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*; Peter A. Hall, ed., *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism Across Nations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); Kathryn Sikkink, *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Judith Goldstein, "The Impact of Ideas on Trade Policy: The Origins of U.S. Agricultural and Manufacturing Policies," *International Organization* 43 (Winter 1989), pp. 31–71; Judith Goldstein, "Ideas, Institutions, and American Trade Policy," *International Organization* 42 (Winter 1988), pp. 179–217; Ernst B. Haas, *When Knowledge Is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); John S. Odell, *U.S. International Monetary Policy: Markets, Power, and Ideas as Sources of Change* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); and Emanuel Adler, *The Power of Ideology: The Quest for Technological Autonomy in Argentina and Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

central role, such as the ecological movement or a series of smaller issue-specific movements.⁸³

To make the concept of an issue-network more useful, we need to distinguish how it differs from other concepts that could be used to frame the international dimensions of the human rights issue: an international human rights regime, an epistemic community, a transnational human rights social movement, or other forms of transnational relations.⁸⁴

Although the social movement literature has concentrated on social movements within countries, it occasionally refers to international social movements as well.⁸⁵ The idea of a social movement, however, with its emphasis on bottom-up citizen protest, fails to portray accurately the range of actors involved in the human rights issues, including foundations and international and regional organizations. We could call the nongovernmental part of the network an international social movement, but the name would not work for the network as a whole.

The regime literature illuminates the emergence of international human rights regimes,⁸⁶ but it focuses too exclusively on states and international organizations as the sole "regime makers."⁸⁷ The focus on networks complements the regime literature by drawing attention to the role of nongovernmental actors in developing norms and helping to create, monitor, and strengthen some regimes.

By stressing the importance of international interactions of nonstate actors, this article follows in the tradition of earlier work in transnational politics.⁸⁸ Interdependence theorists correctly signaled the emergence of multiple channels of contacts among societies and the resultant blurring of domestic politics and international politics.⁸⁹ Recent work now seeks to revive the debate on

83. See Keck and Sikkink, "International Issue Networks in the Environment and Human Rights"; and Kathryn Sikkink, "Codes of Conduct for Transnational Corporations: The Case of the WHO/UNICEF Code," *International Organization* 40 (Autumn 1986), pp. 815–40.

84. For an example of an exploration of the human rights issue using both the regime literature and the social movement literature, see Alison Brysk, "From Above and Below: Social Movements, the International System and Human Rights in Argentina," *Comparative Political Studies*, forthcoming.

85. For example, Saul H. Mendlovitz and R. B. J. Walker, eds., *Towards a Just World Peace: Perspectives from Social Movements* (Boston: Butterworths, 1987).

86. See N. G. Onuf and V. Spike Peterson, "Human Rights from an International Regime Perspective," *Journal of International Affairs* 37 (Winter 1984), pp. 329–42; and Jack Donnelly, "International Human Rights: A Regime Analysis," *International Organization* 40 (Summer 1986), pp. 599–642.

87. "International Regimes," special issue, *International Organization* 36 (Spring 1982).

88. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, eds., *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

89. Other works now exploring this blurring of domestic and international politics include the following by Douglas A. Chalmers: "The International Dimensions of Political Institutions in Latin America: An Internationalized Approach," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 3–6 September 1992, pp. 1–35; and "An End to Foreign Policy: The U.S. and Internationalized Politics," conference paper no. 60, presented at a

transnational relations.⁹⁰ Although the “new transnationalism” attempts to narrow and make more precise the definitions of transnational relations, the only factors that many of these transnational relations share is that all operate across national borders and all are characterized by purposeful actors, at least one of which is a nonstate agent. What the new transnationalists fail to distinguish, however, is how completely different are the purposes of the different types of transnational relations.

Issue-networks differ from other types of transnational relations in terms of the kinds of ideas and purposes that bind them together. We can identify three main categories of transnational relations, based on the different goals and ideas they embody: (1) transnational relations motivated by *instrumental goals* such as the goal of profit or economic gain, (2) transnational relations motivated by shared *causal ideas* (epistemic communities),⁹¹ and (3) transnational relations motivated by *shared values or principled ideas*—beliefs about what is right or wrong (issue-networks). Each of these subsets of transnational relations has, in turn, a characteristic set of actors. Transnational corporations, global banks, and internationally organized interest groups are characteristic of the first category, groups of scientists or knowledge-based experts characterize epistemic communities, and activist NGOs characterize issue-networks. Human rights has its set of knowledge-based experts—the international lawyers who have defined international human rights law—but in the human rights issue-area, change comes about not through experts exposing the technical complexities but by nongovernmental actors mobilizing shame by disseminating information about government repression.

Sovereignty is not going to disappear. The sovereign state remains the dominant force in protecting and violating human rights. But states are altering their understandings of the scope and limits of sovereign authority. Sovereignty

research conference entitled “Crossing National Borders: Invasion or Involvement,” Columbia University, New York, 6 December 1991. Another way of theorizing this interpenetration of the domestic and international spheres is the concept of two-level games. See Robert Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organization* 42 (Summer 1988), pp. 427–60; and Evans, Jacobson, and Putnam, *Double-Edged Diplomacy*.

90. Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Transnational Relations, Domestic Structures, and International Institutions: A Conceptual Framework,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 3–6 September 1992.

91. Epistemic communities also share some values, and issue-networks share causal knowledge, but each has a characteristic type of shared idea that defines it and explains the nature of the transnational relations created. Haas has stressed that epistemic communities share both principled and causal ideas, but it is clear from his discussion of the concept, as well as from the cases chosen to illustrate it, that shared causal beliefs under conditions of technical complexity are the hallmarks of the epistemic community. See Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,” p. 18. This fact is recognized by the one essay on epistemic communities in which activist groups play a key role: M. J. Peterson, “Whalers, Cetologists, Environmentalists, and the International Management of Whaling,” *International Organization* 46 (Winter 1992), pp. 147–86. Peterson argues that the environmentalist groups concerned with whaling do not qualify as an epistemic community. The tendency of these groups to use the “time honored device of making stark contrasts and dividing the world into ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’” is a clear description of action based primarily on principled rather than causal beliefs (pp. 154–55).

is being reconstituted by an accumulation of practices, many as ordinary as writing a letter on behalf of a prisoner of conscience, others as path-breaking as international court decisions against a government for disappearing its citizens. The bulk of issue-network activities can be categorized under the rubric of information or education. Networks attempt to alter state human rights practices primarily by changing the information environment in which state actors work. In most cases this information consisted of documentation and testimony of human rights violations, often described in very personal and graphic terms.

How is it possible that such activities reshape sovereignty? Because sovereignty is a set of intersubjective understandings about the legitimate scope of state authority, reinforced by practices, the mundane activities of the human rights network can accumulate to question the idea that it is nobody else's business how a state treats its subjects. Every report, conference, or letter from the network underscores an alternative understanding: the basic rights of individuals are not the exclusive domain of the state but are a legitimate concern of the international community. The evidence of this new understanding can be found not only in the statements made by states but more importantly in their changing actions. In the cases of both Argentina and Mexico, the states often responded to such pressures by changing their rhetoric and by changing concrete state policies.

I argue here that the concept of principled issue-networks is a useful tool to capture the character of the transnational movements that have shared principled ideas as their defining characteristic. The concept of issue-networks may be useful for understanding actions in issue-areas other than human rights, where principled ideas also influence international relations but gain their strength from their embodiment in transnationally linked organizations and from their ability to transform state understandings. In the realm of human rights the result has been that one of the central principles of international life—sovereignty—is being gradually but significantly reconceptualized. This study suggests that at least in this subset of issues, more attention needs to be paid to the crucial role of issue-networks as the carriers of transformative ideas and to the actors who help create and sustain new international regimes.