

Conceptualizing Norm Diffusion: Network Structure and Social Pressure

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Abstract

How do norms diffuse through the international system? Previous research has explained key mechanisms and specific cases, but important puzzles remain: Why do some norms emerge among powerful states and diffuse to the periphery while others emerge from and spread through the periphery before core states adopt them? Why does the diffusion of some norms start and stop, spreading in waves? This article considers the relationship between network structure and diffusion mechanisms to explain different patterns of norm diffusion in international politics. Drawing on sociological and network analytic approaches, it proposes a theoretical framework that conceptualizes norm diffusion in terms of network structure and social pressure. Testable implications of the theory are illustrated with a summary of the normative shift regarding the use of antipersonnel landmines. The theory can explain what conditions are conducive to hegemonic or peripheral diffusion and when diffusions are likely to start or stop. The findings have policy implications regarding best practices for norm entrepreneurs.

1 Introduction

The study of the diffusion of international norms and policies has generated a significant body of literature; this research has identified many mechanisms that promote the diffusion of new norms and the policies that formalize those norms in domestic politics or international law. Networks have been a core focus, particularly networks of transnational advocacy groups and networks of co-membership in international organizations (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Greenhill 2010). But relatively few studies apply insights from network analysis to improve understanding about the diffusion process.¹ More work is needed that considers how diffusion mechanisms relate to one another and function in international networks.

Theorizing the relationship between these mechanisms and network structure can help resolve significant puzzles about spatial and temporal patterns of norm diffusion. Most diffusion research focuses on the importance of powerful, well-connected states and NGOs acting as intermediaries and advocates (Dobbin, Simmons and Garrett 2007; Bob 2019). But diffusion has followed many patterns. New ideas often spread through hegemony, from the core of the international network outward to the periphery, as with the diffusion of liberal democratic and free-market norms (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990; Gunitsky 2017). But peripheral diffusion is also possible: Norms have started among small and middle powers, taken hold, and in time come

¹For notable exceptions, see Elkins and Simmons (2005), Goddard (2009), Carpenter (2011), Lake and Wong (2009), and Avant and Westerwinter (2016).

to constrain the range of legitimate action available to the great powers even despite their resistance; this has resulted in prohibitions on the use of force to recoup national debt, wartime protections for civilians, the formation of the International Criminal Court, and the treaty banning cluster munitions (Finnemore 2003; Mantilla 2018; Bower 2017; Petrova 2019). Some norms diffuse in mixed patterns — initial U.S. support for negotiations on the proscription of the use of antipersonnel land mines (AP mines) encouraged international participation, but when the United States and other key countries ultimately decided not to support the final treaty, the international consensus on the most strict version held and has now come to affect state policy even among states that did not sign or ratify the treaty (Price 1998; Bower 2016).

Similarly, temporal patterns of diffusion also vary in interesting ways. Some diffusions occur in waves, characterized by periods of rapid spread and stagnation. The “norm life cycle” suggests that norms reach a tipping point and then cascade through the international system, but often adoption proceeds in fits and starts — as has been the case with the diffusion of the democratic regimes and electoral sex quotas (Huntington 1991; Gunitsky 2018; Towns 2012). I argue that these variations can be explained through careful consideration of the pressures that actors are subject to, both pressure to maintain the status quo and to adopt an emerging norm.

In this paper, I propose a “network pressure theory” to explain the diffusion of international norms that applies insights from network theory to build on concepts from existing research on norm and policy diffusion. It conceptualizes norm diffusion as the product of the structure of the international system and the agency of specific actors, including state governments and non-governmental organizations.

The theoretical framework has two parts: First, it emphasizes the role of *network structure*. Diffusion occurs through international networks of state and non-state actors, and how these actors are connected is important for whether diffusion is possible and how it occurs. Considerable research acknowledges the role of central, powerful states, and the theory argues that dense, centralized network structures are conducive to hegemonic diffusion. But the theory also draws attention to the ways in which centralization can impede the diffusion of norms that emerge in the periphery; in these instances, relatively isolated clusters of actors are more conducive to producing diffusion because they insulate developing norms from hegemonic pressures.

The second part of the framework is the *moderated pressure* that is conveyed through network ties to affect decisions to adopt a new norm or maintain the status quo. Previous approaches have categorized mechanisms in terms of coercion, competition, learning, and socialization/emulation (Graham, Shipan and Volden 2012; Maggetti and Gilardi 2016). Yet certain pressures may carry greater weight in a government’s decisionmaking on account of moderating factors, from the perceived legitimacy of the norm to the relative importance of advocates of adoption and the status quo in the government’s selectorate. Reconceptualizing diffusion mechanisms in terms of pressure factors, which create incentives and disincentives for adoption or

non-adoption, and moderating factors, which weight these incentives according to their importance to the government, can help us better understand the process by which these mechanisms produce diffusion.

This theory, I suggest, can better describe the range of possible patterns of norm diffusion and provide insights about when, why, and how some norms cascade while others do not. Variations in the density of network ties and application of moderated pressure result in different patterns of diffusion, with norm emergence among powerful, high-degree states being conducive to hegemonic diffusion and norm emergence among somewhat isolated clusters of middle and small powers being conducive to peripheral diffusion. Additionally, strong ties and high incentives can motivate rapid adoption of new norms, but diffusions may be arrested by weak ties and moderating pressures that reduce the salience of incentives relative to incentives to maintain the status quo; in these cases, norm cascades may stall until a systemic shock shifts the moderated pressure toward adoption.

The theoretical framework is intended as a heuristic. My hope is that this will aid in conceptualizing norm diffusion, but it has policy implications, as well: Knowing what mechanisms and network structures promote diffusion matters for where and how norm entrepreneurs should focus their efforts.

I begin with a review of the literature on norm diffusion and previous efforts that have engaged with the network analysis literature. I then describe the theory's two-part framework — structure and moderated pressure — and how these features interact. After describing the framework, I discuss how it can help explain different patterns of diffusion, including spatial and temporal variations that have been insufficiently theorized. I then apply the framework to a canonical case, the normative shift regarding the use of AP mines, to demonstrate how the theory sheds new light on the pattern of the norm's diffusion (which has elements of both hegemonic and peripheral diffusion) and temporal variation in state adoption. Finally, I conclude by discussing the theory's relevance for further research and policy applications.

2 What We Know About Norm Diffusion

A norm, according to a consensus definition, is “a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891). Social norms affect individuals' behaviors in a society, enjoining them to take specific actions in some circumstances and not in others on the basis of their appropriateness and consequences (Elster 2015); international norms are the set of formal and informal rules that condition and circumscribe the actions of states in the “anarchical society” of international politics (Bull 1977). They are inherently prescriptive in that they reflect a collective understanding of how actors should behave — Finnemore and Sikkink write that they “embody a quality of ‘oughtness’” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891). This draws a distinction between the existence of a norm and states' adherence to the norm; norms are

defined by the expectation of how states will behave on the basis of a code of appropriateness rather than their actions.² What behaviors a norm prescribes can vary by identity group and can change over time with shifts in social mores and political influence. Indeed, much of the literature on international norms considers how norms change, with notable studies considering subjects like shifts in the legitimacy of justifications for military intervention and apartheid in South Africa (Finnemore 2003; Klotz 1995).

A core question in the literature on norms considers when and how they spread. Diffusion is a product of the ways in which the interdependence of actors influences each other's behavior; a commonly referenced definition of diffusion from sociology considers it to be "any process where prior adoption of a trait or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for the remaining non-adopters" (Strang 1991, 325). Norm diffusion is a critical part of the norm "life cycle," in which norms emerge and gather early adopters who advocate for further acceptance and internalization, then reach a critical mass of adherents that facilitate a "cascade" through much of the system, and ends with internalization, often through the creation of new institutions or formal rules or treaties (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Much of the literature on norm diffusion focuses on the role of transnational advocacy networks, including NGOs and activists — Keck and Sikkink place special emphasis on the interplay between domestic pressure on governments to adopt norms and foreign NGOs that produce a "boomerang effect" that redirects that domestic pressure through foreign actors to promote norm adoption (Keck and Sikkink 1998). But norms also spread in other ways, including through state-to-state pressure and influence. In many cases, this diffusion follows patterns of state power and influence, but there are also significant instances of "nonhegemonic norm development" (Ingebritsen 2006; Bower 2017; Long 2022). My goal in this article is to provide a framework for conceptualizing how this diffusion occurs and draw out the implications of states' network context for this process.

Research has produced a long list of factors that promote the diffusion of norms (Graham, Shipan and Volden 2012). These factors are sometimes described in terms of three or four broad categories: coercion, competition, learning, and socialization/emulation (Elkins and Simmons 2005; Graham, Shipan and Volden 2012; Maggetti and Gilardi 2016). Coercive factors promote specific normative behavior by creating positive or negative incentives for adoption or non-adoption. Competitive factors shift incentives for an actor's behavior indirectly, as when a state's adoption of a norm raises the costs to others of maintaining the status quo; these factors appear frequently in literature about economic norms. Learning includes factors that alter an actor's perception of the incentives for adoption. Socialization and emulation function similarly, but rather than being rooted in a norm or policy's perceived benefit, these factors drive adoption on the basis of identity and status.

²Norm strength is the subject of considerable discussion, but is not a focus of this article. See Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2019 and Ben-Josef Hirsch and Dixon 2021.

While this typology is helpful in many respects, it omits other factors that are important in diffusion processes. Considerable research has emphasized the salience of homophily, which is the tendency of actors with shared characteristics to form connections. Homophilous relations facilitate “social learning” of normative beliefs (Strang and Meyer N.d.; Slaughter 1995). Comembership in international organizations is often a form of homophily, especially with regards to issue or region-specific organizations that unite states with common interests. International organizations provide forums in which government actors can persuade peers to adopt norms for increased status or material benefit, and comembership can facilitate preference convergence over time (Greenhill 2010; Sommerer and Tallberg 2019; Egel and Obermeier 2023). More generally, Wendt identifies four homophilous characteristics — interdependence, perceptions of a common fate, homogeneity, and self-restraint — that, when shared among actors, promote norm diffusion (Wendt 1999).

3 The Role of Networks in Norm Diffusion

International networks have always been implicit in research on norm diffusion, and over time work has increasingly made this explicit and drawn on the network analysis literature to create a theoretical underpinning for the role of network structure in diffusion (Hafner-Burton, Kahler and Montgomery 2009). A network, at its simplest, is “a set of nodes and a set of ties representing the presence or absence of relationships between nodes” (Avant and Westerwinter 2016, 6). In the literature on norm diffusion, research has often focused on the relationships among transnational advocacy groups and states that serve as conduits for new ideas (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Barnett 2011).

Two particular node characteristics have been singled out in the norms literature for their significance to diffusion processes. Degree centrality describes the number of ties a node has; a node with high degree centrality is connected to many other nodes in the network, while a node with low degree centrality is connected to few. Degree centrality in international networks is often correlated with wealth and other forms of material power: the great powers, for example, have far more alliances with and embassies in other states than do small and middle powers. These nodes form the core of international networks, while states with lower degree centrality constitute the periphery — an organization reinforced by many of the algorithms for generating network visualizations, which place high-degree nodes toward the center of the network.

Previous work on diffusion that integrates network analysis emphasizes the gatekeeping and agenda-setting power that high degree centrality endows actors. Carpenter describes the ways that high-degree “hubs” in advocacy networks use their network position to vet issues and select among them by legitimizing some and not others (Carpenter 2011). Similarly, Lake and Wong, in a study of the formation of Amnesty International and the broader human rights transnational advocacy movement, describe how norms within

the system came about “as a result of a central node that exercised agenda-setting power by controlling the flow of information in the network” (Lake and Wong 2009). They suggest that this agenda-setting power derived from degree centrality lowers transaction costs and is self-reinforcing because it furthers the central node’s power by positioning it as a mediator for disputes.

Other research has emphasized betweenness centrality, which characterizes a node by its significance for connecting otherwise unconnected nodes in a network. The canonical example of betweenness centrality is Padgett and Ansell’s study of 15th-Century Florentine aristocracy, which demonstrated that the Medicis, though they were not the most connected family in their social network, were able to leverage their position at the intersection of powerful rivals to control the flow of information and opportunities to their benefit (Padgett and Ansell 1993). In some types of networks, these forms of centrality can overlap; notably, in a “star” or “hub and spokes” network with one central node connected bilaterally to an array of secondary nodes, the central node has both the greatest degree centrality (being connected to many nodes while all other nodes in the network are connected to only one other node) and the greatest betweenness centrality (in that any path between any two secondary nodes must pass through the central hub). Much of the literature on brokerage and diffusion descends from Granovetter’s findings on the “strength of weak ties” — the observation that the transmission of information is more efficient in networks in which cliques of dense ties are connected by acquaintances (actors with high betweenness centrality) (Granovetter 1973). Though the bonds between the acquaintances may not be as strong, they are an important conduit for external sources of information. These weak ties bridge “structural holes” in networks that impede the diffusion of information and ideas (Burt 1992).

Goddard emphasizes the significance of betweenness centrality and the way that it creates opportunities for brokerage in international networks (Goddard 2009). States at the intersection of different cliques of nodes can fill structural holes between groups, using their cultural knowledge of each to tailor messaging to target audiences to better facilitate the transmission of ideas. This makes states with high betweenness centrality critical actors as “political entrepreneurs” in the diffusion of international norms.

Some literature has drawn attention to the role of network structure in norm diffusion. In addition to centrality, Avant and Westerwinter note the significance of the density and distribution of ties in a network and the quality of those ties for their ability to transmit security norms (Avant and Westerwinter 2016). I build on these contributions by introducing another concept from network theory — complex contagion — to further explain how variations in structure condition diffusion.

Network models that use thresholds to illustrate the importance of social reinforcement significantly change our understanding of the role of network structure in diffusion processes. Centola makes a distinction between “simple” or “epidemiological” diffusion and “complex” diffusion; simple diffusion occurs through a

single exposure and allows a vector to spread unimpeded through any network tie, while complex diffusion requires social reinforcement as a condition of adoption (Centola 2018, see also Centola and Macy 2007). In other words, complex diffusion is a threshold model, in which adoption by an actor is contingent on the behavior of a certain number or proportion of neighbors (Granovetter 1978). Centola argues that complex diffusion is a much better model for most social phenomena (Centola 2018). Catching a disease is not a choice, but adopting a behavior or belief is. Additionally, expressing that behavior or belief can expose the individual to social sanction if it is not supported by others within the community. When this occurs, individuals face social pressure to maintain the status quo; simple exposure to a new controversial idea or belief will usually be insufficient for it to spread, and it may take adoption by several connected peers before an individual's threshold for adoption can overcome this status-quo pressure.

This observation has important applications for theories of norm diffusion in the international system. In particular, it reinforces the significance of network structure. While existing research stresses the ways that highly-centralized networks *facilitate* diffusion, the literature on complex diffusion demonstrates how this same structure can also *impede* diffusion. With a hub-and-spokes network, in which one central node is connected to many peripheral nodes that are not connected to one another, adoption by the central node creates a rapid diffusion — for each of the peripheral nodes, 100 percent of their neighbors (the one central node to which they are connected) have adopted and so they are likely to as well. But adoption by any one peripheral node will not allow diffusion; the central node is unlikely to adopt because of the strength of social reinforcement of the status quo by the overwhelming majority of peripheral nodes that have not adopted.

In more complex network structures, the principles of complex contagion demonstrate the importance of variations in network density. If relatively isolated clusters of nodes in a network adopt a behavior or belief together, their interconnection can work to insulate that behavior from the status-quo pressure that pervades the rest of the network. Network research in this tradition considers how networks structured like chains of small islands — clusters of densely connected nodes that are sparsely connected across clusters — have facilitated a range of diffusion processes, from the development of altruistic, pro-social behaviors, to innovative practices within organizations, to the adoption of controversial beliefs and behaviors (Boorman and Levitt 1980; McGrath and Krackhardt 2003; Centola 2018). Existing research on norm diffusion would benefit from this line of research and the development of theories that reconcile when and how centrality and network structure matter for diffusion processes. However, in isolation, these theories suggest that network structure is deterministic — they leave little room for individual agency (Atwell 2020). A comprehensive theory of norm diffusion should describe the ways in which different structures are conducive to different patterns of diffusion *and* the agency of specific actors engaging in advocacy and policy deliberation within these international structures.

4 A Network-Pressure Theory of Norm Diffusion

The literature on norm diffusion demonstrates the complexity of the diffusion process. Our understanding of norm diffusion would benefit from a conceptual framework that synthesizes this research in order to describe how the interrelationships between structure and diffusion mechanisms function. I propose here a network-pressure theory of norm diffusion, in which state behavior is a product of the competing pressures to maintain a status-quo norm or adopt a competing norm that a government is exposed to through its position in the international network. The theoretical framework has two features: the structure of the international network and the forms of pressure to maintain the status quo or adopt a new norm that are conveyed through network ties.

4.1 Structure

The network literature makes a compelling case that network structure matters for state behavior, and in particular for the diffusion of international norms, but in what ways? The first issue concerns levels of analysis. The process of norm diffusion spans the three classic levels of analysis in International Relations: Norms are systems of belief and behavior that are adhered to by individuals and advocated by non-governmental organizations, but a first-image analysis tells only a partial story of international norms. International norms are institutionalized by states through policy and international agreements, and it is states that are bound by normative commitments in treaties, not just individuals. Additionally, this theory and related research proposes that norm diffusion is also contingent on the structure of the international system — the distribution of power and the way that power and influence flows through links in the international network (e.g., Avant and Westerwinter 2016). This multilevel process is evident in Keck and Sikkink's characterization of transnational norm advocacy, in which non-governmental organizations work at the subnational level to coordinate domestic and international advocacy campaigns, and these campaigns are then implemented through other NGOs, cooperating state governments, and intergovernmental organizations (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

The shared thread that runs through these levels of analysis, as in all power politics, is collective mobilization (Goddard and Nexon 2016). Individuals organize in favor or against the adoption of emerging norms; this advocacy is often most effective when organized through an effective NGO, and strengthened through international coordination and reinforcement. With enough support, this mobilization can affect state policy, leading to the institutionalization of the norm in law and its promotion to other countries as an element of foreign policy. How this occurs is contingent on the distribution of power in a state's domestic polity (its selectorate) and the structure of its international relationships.

In the context of norm contestation, there is an existing status-quo norm and a new norm (or perhaps

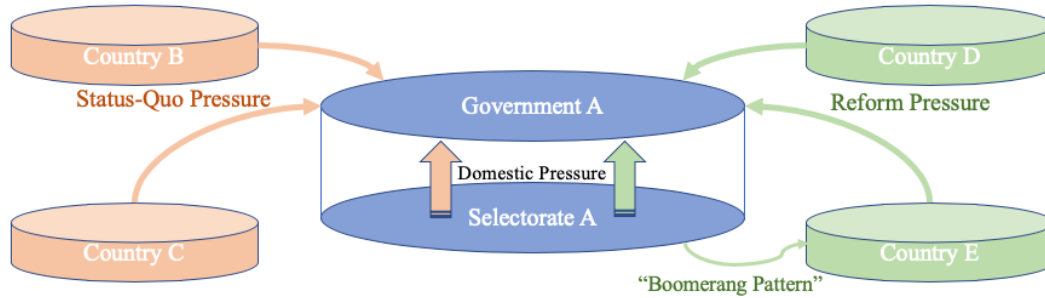


Figure 1: An ego network illustrating social pressure influencing Government A’s adherence to a norm or the status quo.

multiple versions of a new norm), with different actors exerting pressure on the government for each. Both domestic and international actors exert pressure, which is conveyed through the relationships among them. Domestically, the government is subject to pressure from its selectorate. The selectorate comprises the actors to which the government is accountable; in autocracies this is the ruling coalition of elites, and in democracies, the constituents of elected leaders, though not all of these constituents exert equal influence (Mesquita et al. 2003). Internationally, foreign states and NGOs may also have preferences for the government’s behavior and exert pressure on the government and selectorate in favor of the status quo or the adoption of a new norm.

Figure 1 illustrates this dynamic for Government A’s direct network ties, each representing a relationship through which influence can travel; this is called an “ego network,” with the central node being the “ego” and its linked nodes called “alters.” Government A has strong ties with four alters — Countries B, C, D, and E. (Ego networks set aside the rest of the network that may exert pressure on these states, and for the sake of simplicity I have black boxed the alters’ domestic contexts here.) Countries D and E have adopted a new international norm, but Countries B and C have not. Depending on their interest in the norm, each of these states will exert some amount of pressure on Government A to either maintain the status quo or adopt the new norm.

The simultaneous pressure from domestic actors and international actors on the government creates a two-level game, in which the government must consider the preferences of its domestic constituents and international partners (Putnam 1988; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). But in the case of norm diffusion, the levels of the game are not completely separated from one another. As Keck and Sikkink observe, domestic constituencies can exploit this structure to exert further pressure on the government by rallying sympathetic foreign actors to also pressure the government — what they call the “boomerang pattern” (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

These dynamics are important to consider when zooming out from the ego network to consider how

social pressure interacts with structure in a broader network context. Because norm adoption involves social reinforcement, it is affected by how a state fits into the international system. Research in network theory emphasizes the significance of local density — how interconnected neighborhoods are relative to the broader network in which they reside. When clusters of actors are relatively isolated from the rest of the network, forming an “island” within the system, they are more capable of developing and sustaining innovations because they are insulated from much of the status-quo pressure that might permeate the rest of the network. In networks with homogenous actors, this suggests that more isolated actors in the network may be more likely to adopt a new norm because of their relatively lower exposure to status-quo pressure, and that more central nodes may be less likely because of the greater number of ties exerting pressure to maintain the status quo. Norm emergence in relatively isolated clusters within the network is more conducive to peripheral diffusion; if a norm emerges in a dense part of the network periphery, it is less likely to spread.

This observation about isolation and social reinforcement is complicated in the international system because actors are also influenced by domestic constituencies, and states with greater status, power, or vested interest in change may exert greater pressure in ways that lead to norm adoption by a government even when the majority of lower status, less powerful, or less interested states in its network, and even its domestic constituents, may favor maintaining the status quo. Powerful, high-degree states acting as central hubs in a dense international network may be able to use their disproportionate influence to override status-quo pressure from less powerful states or their constituencies and encourage a norm that emerges at the core of the network to diffuse. If a state is sufficiently powerful and willing to promote the norm to overcome status-quo pressure, density becomes an asset rather than a liability for diffusion because the powerful state can spread the norm to a greater number of connected states. In these circumstances, norm emergence in a hub state in a densely connected network is conducive to hegemonic diffusion.

4.2 Moderated Pressure

Social pressure among actors in the international network exerts heterogenous influence for the maintenance of the status quo or the adoption of new norms. How does the mechanism of social pressure function, and what produces this heterogeneity? I argue that it is helpful to organize factors into two categories: *pressure factors*, which provide incentives for norm adoption, and *moderating factors*, which can increase or decrease the effect of pressure factors on governments’ decision to adopt.³ The combination of these two factors produce moderated pressure — this is conveyed through network ties, from foreign actors and domestic groups within the selectorate to influence the government.

³As in a “moderating variable,” distinct from the concept of a “mediating variable.” “A mediator is a variable on the pathway from the treatment to the outcome. A moderator is a variable such that the effect of the treatment on the outcome

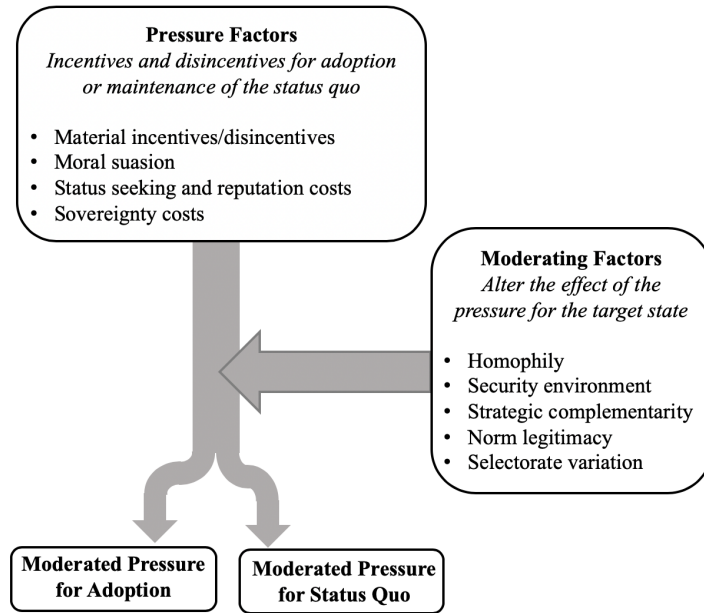


Figure 2: Pressure factors provide (dis)incentives for a state adopting a new norm or maintaining the status quo. Moderating factors affect these by amplifying or diminishing the pressure they exert on a government. The examples listed are not exhaustive.

4.2.1 Pressure Factors

Pressure factors are the mechanisms that convey pressure on the government to adopt a norm or policy or maintain the status quo. They can be visualized as the contents of the arrows in Figure 1. Pressure factors can be conceptualized in terms of incentives and disincentives, though the costs and benefits need not be material. Pressure can come from foreign states (directly or indirectly through international organizations), from domestic actors that advocate for policies directly to their government or through transnational advocacy groups, and from the international system itself. How much a government weights these incentives in their considerations will vary on the basis of the moderating factors discussed subsequently.

Pressure factors can take many forms. The following discussion is not exhaustive, and is intended to survey some broad categories of potential factors. The clearest and most direct pressures are material incentives and disincentives. These include the promise of security assistance, aid, or debt relief conditional on the adoption of certain behaviors (e.g., Greenhill 2010). In some cases, conditionality need not even be explicit; though gender quotas have not been explicit requirements for the provision of aid, they have diffused among aid-reliant states that have adopted them to send a signal to donor states with the expectation of reciprocation in aid (Bush 2011). Disincentives can include the reduction of aid, or at an extreme, punitive measures that include the threat or application of economic sanctions and military intervention (for example,

differs for different levels of the moderator variable” (VanderWeele 2015, 216).

see Tocci 2016, Schneider and Urpelainen 2013).

Many pressure factors involve the manipulation of non-material incentives. States may adopt a norm to increase their international status, or because maintaining the status quo could incur reputation costs. Status and reputation are inherently social attributes, determined by recognition by other actors in a network on the basis of behavior that facilitates relations of group membership (Larson, Paul and Wohlforth 2014; Duque 2018). Norm adoption can be a prerequisite to attaining access to high-status clubs, like NATO, the EU, and the OECD, and a means for rising powers to signal the legitimacy of their interests to preempt potential challenges from great powers (Greenhill 2010; Goddard 2018). Other non-material incentives concern moral legitimacy and sanction, which has previously been identified as a microfoundation for diffusion, particularly in early stages of norm emergence (Kertzer 2017; Kertzer et al. 2014; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Moral arguments can be mobilized to “name and shame” holdouts that resist adoption, but also can be used to affirm the status quo, as has been the case with appeals to moral foundations of “purity” and “sanctity” to resist the adoption of LGBTQ+ rights norms (Lebovic and Voeten 2006; Bob N.d.; Price and Sikkink 2021).

Finally, it is worth stressing that pressure factors can also be the product of domestic interests and structures. Sovereignty costs — the powers that state actors give up by making binding international commitments — are often relevant in discussions of the institutionalization of international norms because they constitute a pressure on elites against ceding authority to supranational authorities (Cole 2005, 5). Sovereignty costs have been an impediment to state participation in many international institutions that commit states to particular modes of accountability for violations of international agreements (Moravcsik 2000; Betti 2016; Peck 2022).

4.2.2 Moderating Factors

Moderating factors alter how pressure factors are perceived by the target state. These factors assign heterogeneous weights to the various pressure factors. A moderating factor conditions the effect of a pressure factor like the volume dial on an amplifier conditions a chord played on an electric guitar — it can mute the pressure factor (deemphasizing it in the target state’s deliberation) or amplify it to 11 (such that it plays an outsize role in the target state’s behavior). Moderating factors can help explain the ways influence varies across different network relationships and how incentives can shift over time. Like pressure factors, moderating factors can take many forms, and the types proposed here are not exhaustive.

Some moderating factors are systemic. The embeddedness of norms in institutions or practices can create a “stickiness” that can withstand violations or efforts to modify the norm; this increased difficulty of modification could decrease the salience of adoption pressures and increase the salience of status-quo pressure (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2019). Sometimes the rules of institutions can moderate incentives;

Mantilla's concept of "forum isolation," by which small and middle powers were able to pressure France and the United Kingdom to support provisions governing internal conflict in Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, is based on reputational and moral pressures moderated by conditions of public debate and majority decisionmaking under one-state-one-vote rules that amplified the pressure of less-powerful states (Mantilla 2018).

Other systemic moderating factors shift pressure incentives over time based on the behavior of other states. Adoption by others can shift the cumulative benefit of adoption through a process of strategic complementarity. When states participate in a norm — for example, liberal economic norms — it can alter the benefits to others to participate; while the incentive may be marginal at first, the incentive to adopt (and the costs of maintaining the status quo) can be amplified over time as others buy in (Simmons and Elkins 2004). Norm legitimacy is also a systemic moderating factor that shifts with increases in adoption over time. As more states adopt a norm, the more legitimate the norm is perceived to be (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). While early adopters might be going out on a limb and staking a claim to a norm's legitimacy through their entrepreneurship, greater adoption conveys a consensus that a norm is legitimated by the international community that amplifies pressure factors, particularly status and moral pressures.⁴ These combinations of factors underpin the processes of "social learning" and "mimicry." What is generally meant by these terms is that behavior changed because material and moral incentives were amplified by increasing information and legitimacy generated by the adoption of other actors.

Other moderating factors are dyadic. Homophily can increase the salience of pressure factors by creating a shared framework for understanding a norm. Cultural homophily has been observed to facilitate public support for the adoption of domestic policies, and states that are culturally proximate to multiple actors are particularly well positioned to act as brokers that can engage in "multivocal" advocacy that code switches by audience on the basis of cultural knowledge and "localize" frames to specific cultural contexts (Linos 2011; Goddard 2009; Acharya 2004). Institutional homophily can also amplify adoption pressures because shared institutional characteristics make it easier to emulate a policy (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). For example, policy transfer among European Union states has been facilitated by similar monetary institutions among member states (Holzinger and Knill 2005).

A third set of moderating factors are specific to each state. A state's security environment, for instance, can significantly affect how a state responds to adoption and status-quo pressure for norms concerning weapons use and armed conflict. If a state faces pressing threats it will likely weight the sovereignty costs of giving up a weapon in its arsenal or limiting its strategic options more than a state that does not (discussed

⁴This is also evident in the way in which some norm entrepreneurs promote emerging norms through frames that "graft" onto existing normative frameworks (Price 1998). In the theory's terms, this could be described as a means to amplify status and moral pressures before a norm cascade has occurred.

further in Section 6). The distribution of power and interests in the government's selectorate also moderates pressure factors. While pressure factor incentives and disincentives might affect the state as a whole, they will affect interest groups to which the government is accountable differently. Key actors, like the military and transnational advocacy organizations, may exert disproportionate influence by weighting some pressures over others in ways that can vary from one administration to the next as the balance of power among these groups shifts.

5 Applying the Framework

These two features — the network structure of the international system and the moderated pressure that passes through it — can describe how norms and policies spread among states. It acknowledges the importance of both structure and the agency of state and non-state actors. State actors are connected to other states, NGOs, and their domestic polities through the pressure that these actors exert in favor of adoption or the status quo; these connections are the network structure of normative pressure, and variations in density can contribute to either overwhelming or insulating certain norms. The pressure exerted by these actors can be divided into two types: pressure factors alter material and non-material incentives, and moderating factors weight their importance to the government. Some forms of pressure moderated by the interests of specific actors, like the military or transnational advocacy groups, will be more influential for some states than others. The point at which a state actor adopts a new norm or policy is determined by the balance of pressure to which it is subject; when the moderated pressure for adoption exceeds the moderated pressure for the status quo, the state actor will adopt the norm or policy.

This framework is flexible enough to describe many types and patterns of diffusion that are apparent in research about specific mechanisms or cases. It is complicated — especially when we zoom out from an ego network to consider how pressures function in the international system as a whole, with each state connected to some extent to many other states, and each responding to its own balance of foreign and domestic moderated pressures. The utility of the framework is the way it can serve as a heuristic tool to explain different aspects diffusion processes and the variation between different examples of norm diffusion. Despite this level of abstraction, several falsifiable hypotheses can be drawn from the theory for further study.

To demonstrate its utility, I discuss the theory's implications for two puzzling features of diffusion: the different patterns by which norms diffuse in the international system and the periodization of diffusion..

5.1 Patterns of Diffusion

Why do some norms emerge from the most powerful, core states of the international system and diffuse out through the periphery, while others emerge in the periphery and spread primarily among middle and small powers? Why do some norms reach the critical mass that prompts a norm cascade while others do not? The theory provides concepts that can help explain this variation.

Hegemonic diffusion is the process by which norms emerge in the core and diffuse to the periphery. This is often associated with the spread of norms in periods of hegemonic order building, as powerful states perpetuate standards of political and economic conduct through coercion, inducement, and emulation (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990; Gunitsky 2017). In the terms of the theory, this is a process in which the states that have the most leverage in the international system, and that are often the most connected in the system, exert pressure on less powerful peripheral states. When norms emerge in these countries and they adopt early, their degree centrality provides many conduits to promote adoption in the international system, and they possess material and non-material influence to do so. Great powers can apply direct material incentives through foreign aid or indirect incentives through the competitive pressures that adoption may introduce, and the salience of these pressures may be augmented by peripheral states' reliance on aid or foreign direct investment. These core states can also leverage their role to apply pressure through non-material incentives; as high-status states and gatekeepers for international organizations that confer status, they can pressure states to adopt norms to receive admission into these high-status groups or be associated with high-status states.

Hypothesis 1a: If a great power (or group of great powers) with high material power and status and high degree centrality promotes a norm, diffusion is likely to occur.

But what about instances of peripheral diffusion, in which norms emerge among smaller, less connected actors in the international system? This has been observed, for example, with the diffusion of the norm against military intervention to collect state debt and the norm against the use of cluster munitions (Finnemore 2003; Petrova 2019). Status-quo pressure weighs heavily on peripheral states, but these examples suggest why the moral and material incentives for some peripheral states might outweigh the status quo; this was the case for indebted states badgered by major powers at the start of the 20th Century, and states with a history of being targeted by cluster weapons and subject to the lingering consequences of unexploded munitions.

Network structure is an important ingredient for explaining why some peripheral diffusions spread widely while others do not. Clusters of states — for example, states with strong homophilous bonds that facilitate contemporaneous adoption of a norm on account of morality or identity — can provide social reinforcement and insulate an emergent norm from status-quo pressure in the rest of the international system. Broker

states may then transmit the norm to other states or clusters of states in which the salience of status-quo pressure is outweighed by other moderated pressures. For instance, with the norm against cluster munitions, other early adopters included countries like Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland — high-status states with a reputation for moral leadership that were not reliant on incentives provided by other core states. Diffusion was also promoted through a series of regional conferences that created pressure for adoption in ways tailored to local identities, addressed shared concerns, and isolated states from great and regional powers supportive of the status quo.⁵ This is analogous to the network properties of small-island chains and relatively isolated clusters that insulate and reinforce innovative ideas or behaviors. These pockets of support for norm adoption insulate states from status-quo pressure through mutual reinforcement. As adoption spreads through the international system, this can then create a groundswell of adoption pressure, augmented by increased legitimacy and popular momentum, that in some cases can overcome the status quo even among powerful core states.

Hypothesis 1b: If small and middle powers supportive of a norm are clustered and have stronger ties within their cluster than they do to the great power(s), diffusion is likely to occur.

The framework can also describe instances in which diffusion seems to “jump” across states without obvious connections. After all, emulation and social learning does not require close network ties. In a globalized international system, the success of state policies or the association of certain norms with material benefits or improved status can be observed without direct interaction — but it may be more recognizable among states with greater diplomatic contact and mutual understanding.

5.2 Periodization

Why do some diffusion processes occur in waves? Why do some cascade quickly through the system while others stop and start, or accelerate and decelerate, over time? The theoretical framework provides a mental map for considering how this occurs as a function of structure and pressure.

Structural factors may inhibit diffusion and arrest a norm’s spread. Norms may spread rapidly in clusters of states with close ties, where homophilous bonds facilitate their transmission or competitive pressures encourage adoption to maintain access to resources with neighboring states. But, especially with more isolated clusters of states, this local cascade might not then transfer to other parts of the network. Limited ties to other parts of the system might allow sufficient socially reinforcing pressure in favor of adoption to prompt similar cascades in other regions, especially without cultural bonds or direct competition among states for shared resources. This combination of structural isolation and limited salience from moderating

⁵Borrie (2009, 179) notes that one of the significant benefits of the regional conference hosted by Costa Rica in September 2007 was that it had the “effect of isolating Brazil,” which did not support treaty negotiations.

pressures would arrest a diffusion process, even after a promising start.

But even diffusion processes that seem to have come to a halt can restart, and when unstuck they often proceed rapidly. The diffusion of the norm of democratic governance is described as occurring in “waves” (Huntington 1991; Gunitsky 2018). In the theory’s terms, democratic waves are products of shocks to the political environment, shifts in domestic pressure as popular protest movements rise up against state actors, homophilous bonds that increase the salience of one country’s actions in states with shared political cultures, and information effects that provide evidence that the success of popular mobilization in one country might be replicable in others. This was evident in the regional cascades of democratization in Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War and among Arab countries during the Arab Spring. These waves also benefited from reduced pressure in favor of an autocratic status quo. In Eastern Europe, diffusion occurred in part because it became evident that Soviet leaders were not willing to crack down with the force it had against previous political uprisings, and in the Middle East, the initial, rapid success of revolutionaries in Tunisia and Egypt and the military’s unwillingness to defend the regime in both countries encouraged further uprisings elsewhere. The deceleration of this wave also illustrates the significance of status-quo pressure. Autocratic powers in the Middle East were quick to mobilize pressure after these initial uprisings, suppressing dissent domestically and shifting incentives in their near abroad, where their networks were strongest, in ways that shifted the balance of pressure to favor status-quo, autocratic actors. This stymied other protest movements and incentivized backsliding in transitional democracies like Egypt and Yemen.

Hypothesis 2a: Systemic shocks that produce sudden shifts in pressure and moderating factors make diffusion processes more likely to (re)start or stop.

Hypothesis 2b: Waves of diffusion are most likely to occur within clusters of states with dense ties and homophilous bonds, but less likely to spread beyond these clusters.

When status-quo pressure is minimal, though, structural equivalence and momentum can help cascades break out of isolated clusters and homophilous groups. Structural equivalence as a moderating factor increases the salience of the example of states with similar network-structural characteristics; two countries without strong cultural or political bonds might be linked by comparable national economies, reliance on foreign aid, or perceived status. This, for example, can help describe the periodic regional diffusion of electoral sex quotas. Towns notes that their diffusion reflects a rank ordering of states, with the norm passing among states between categories of “modern” and “traditional” without much regard for regional divides (Towns 2012). Relatedly, Bush notes the importance of shared reliance on foreign aid for this diffusion process, and notes that electoral sex quotas signal type as a means to improve the prospects of foreign aid (Bush 2011). Both of these factors demonstrate the ways in which structural equivalence — whether a similarity in a social hierarchy or reliance on foreign aid — can facilitate social learning and emulation even where direct

network pressure is thin.

6 An Illustrative Case: Antipersonnel Landmines

The theoretical framework can be applied to historical cases of diffusion. I illustrate such an application here, with the goal of making the principles of the theory more concrete. The development and diffusion of the norm against the possession or use of AP mines is a landmark case that has received significant attention in the norms literature. It also exhibits the types of variation that the theory seeks to explain: Notably, it features variation in the pattern of diffusion, starting as a hegemonic diffusion and then shifting to a peripheral diffusion. The rate of adoption has also varied, with states reluctant to implement policies in line with the emerging norm until a systemic shock to the international distribution of power occurred, and support spreading incrementally after. Given these characteristics and its prominence in the literature, the AP mine case is a useful and accessible demonstration of the theory and provides preliminary validation for the hypotheses.

AP mines have been identified as a “conventional weapon of special concern” since the 1950s, but concerted efforts to organize an international ban did not emerge until the 1970s (Tepe 2012). The 1980 U.N. Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) defined landmines and established regulations for their use, but placed no limits on their stockpiling and transfer; even though the CCW constraints were minimal, few countries signed on to the landmine protocol (Dolan and Hunt 1998). Advocacy increased during the 1980s, coinciding with the increasing prevalence and deployment of the weapons, which resulted in rising rates of civilian harm — sometimes incidental, but often part of deliberate strategies to deny civilians access to essential resources like arable land. AP mines are cheap and easy to produce and were exported in large quantities to Cold War battlefields. The list of countries most affected by landmine contamination reads mostly as a list of intrastate conflicts fueled by U.S.-Soviet competition: Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, the Koreas, Laos, Mozambique, Myanmar, Vietnam, among others.

Government interest in an international ban on AP mines did not develop until the early 1990s, after the end of the Cold War. The conclusion of many of the civil wars that were supplied by the United States, the Soviet Union, and their partners lowered the stakes for conflict-affected countries, shifted incentives, and allowed political space for negotiations to occur. Transnational advocacy groups — particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the other organizations cooperating under the umbrella of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL, established in 1993) — played a significant role in communicating the toll that landmines were taking on conflict-affected developing states, raising the profile of the issue and defining the terms of debate (Price 1998; Maslen 1998; White and Rutherford 1998;

Lawson et al. 1998). In the early 1990s, these groups found a willing partner in the U.S. government. U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy was an early advocate of a ban on AP mines, and in 1992 introduced legislation imposing a one-year moratorium on their export; the bill passed the Senate with unanimous support, was signed by President George H.W. Bush, and the moratorium was extended annually until the policy was made standard. The export ban “placed the United States in the lead as the first country to enact domestic legislation on landmines and gave tremendous to the ban movement internationally,” with other countries quickly following suit (Wareham 1998, 214). The following year, the State Department issued a major report on landmine contamination, and in his 1994 address to the U.N. General Assembly, President Bill Clinton called for the “eventual elimination” of AP mines conditional on the development of more humanitarian alternatives, starting with incorporating into the CCW greater limits on their accessibility and use (Clinton 1994).⁶

The U.S. moratorium policy and rhetorical support for greater regulation and an eventual ban signaled a marked shift from the lax norms regarding use institutionalized in the CCW. By the time of the U.N. speech, several countries had followed the U.S. example and also unilaterally halted the export of AP mines, including France and Italy, which at the time was one of the largest producers of AP mines (Williams and Goose 1998). Up to this point, though the issue was initially raised by NGOs relaying the concerns of conflict-affected populations, the normative shift had many hallmarks of a hegemonic diffusion being promoted by the unipolar power in the international system. However, this gave way to contestation regarding the extent of the normative shift; while some countries — most notably Russia, China, and India — held out in their support for the status quo of permissible export and use, others pushed past the proposed U.S. reforms to call for the rapid implementation of a total ban on their stockpiling and use. Advocates of this more thorough policy, led largely by a coalition of middle and small powers coordinating with NGOs, eventually seized the initiative of institutionalizing the shifting norm from the United States. These countries organized a separate negotiating track, apart from the U.S.-backed efforts to incorporate a partial ban into the CCW or U.N. Convention on Disarmament, that eventually culminated in the signing of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction in Ottawa in December 1997. The diffusion of the total ban policy, then, has elements of a peripheral, complex diffusion.

6.1 Structure

The separate negotiating track that institutionalized a total ban was initiated by Canada and a “core group” of supportive states in 1996. A French-initiated and U.S.-supported review of the CCW had concluded

⁶The speech was drafted by future secretary of state Antony Blinken, then a speechwriter at the National Security Council (NSC 1994).

in October 1995 with only minimal changes to existing international law on AP mines, largely due to the negotiations' reliance on international consensus. Frustrated with this outcome, Canada convened a meeting of countries that had expressed support for a total ban; though the declaration calling for a ban had widespread support, including from the United States, the negotiations that followed did not, with all five permanent Security Council states expressing disapproval (Williams and Goose 1998). However, the Ottawa process' core group of advocate states — Canada, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, South Africa, and Switzerland — were able to compensate for the opposition from these more powerful countries.

The core group and their transnational advocacy partners organized their campaign to reinforce support and extend it where they had the most influence. In May and July 1997, regional conferences were convened by core group states in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia to shore up support among potential signatories while isolating them from states critical of the treaty (Lenarcic 1998). Mexico and Canada rallied support for the Ottawa process within the Organization of American States, building on the OAS' 1996 resolution to make the Western Hemisphere an AP mine-free zone; within this community of supportive states, Canada and Mexico were able to overwhelm the countervailing pressure from the United States (Lawson et al. 1998). A similar effort in Africa was coordinated by South Africa under the leadership of Nelson Mandela's Government of National Unity, which worked both with the mine-contaminated states of southern Africa and the Organization of African Unity. These multilateral efforts dovetailed with local campaigns supported by the ICBL (Williams and Goose 1998). By the end of the regional conference held in Kempton Park, South Africa, in May 1997, South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe had issued their own unilateral domestic bans, and of the participating nations, only Egypt expressed reservations about the Ottawa Process (Williams and Goose 1998). The success of this strategy of building support through regional conferences among states with shared interests and framings for the norm provides support for Hypothesis 2b.

The concentration of core group states in Europe was able to compensate for the initial reluctance of several European powers — notably France, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy. Additionally, core states Ireland and the Netherlands' structural position during the critical early phases of the Ottawa Process was augmented by well-timed stints as presidents of the EU Council (Long and Hindle 1998). This combination of structural position in a dense European cluster and the moderating effect of additional institutional power may have been influential in diffusing support for a total ban not only to other EU countries, but to Eastern European countries aspiring to EU membership. When domestic political shifts in France and the United Kingdom prompted a reevaluation of the Ottawa Process, their support provided social reinforcement that bolstered domestic pressure in Italy and Spain that finally pushed these countries to also join the negotiations.

The structure of the international network tends to privilege the most powerful, most connected states. This has granted the United States inordinate power, which was evident in its agenda-setting policy pronouncements in the early-1990s and their emulation by like-minded countries with similar domestic advocacy movements. The early diffusion of export bans is consistent with the facilitating conditions for hegemonic diffusion (Hypothesis 1a).

However, advocates of shifting the norm toward a total ban, beyond the willingness of the United States, were able to overcome this influence through collective action. The Ottawa Process created pockets of support among middle and small powers that could insulate pro-ban states from countervailing pressure from the core of the network. In his mapping of the AP mine negotiation network, Bower finds that advocates benefited from the absence of other powerful and potentially influential opponents; Russia and China, in particular, hardly attempted to influence the negotiations.⁷ And while the United States had the greatest degree and betweenness centrality of any one state actor in the network, these centrality scores are lower than the collective degree and betweenness centrality of the core group of states. This is indicative of a network structure in which more peripheral actors were able to create dense clusters that could reinforce pro-ban behavior and overcome the hegemonic pressure from the core of the network (consistent with Hypothesis 1b); the core group's collective action helped shape a network more conducive to the peripheral diffusion of a total ban policy.

6.2 Moderated Pressure

Changing perceptions of the international security environment and the legitimacy of the emerging norm influenced many states. Starting in the late-1980s, landmine-affected developing states saw the salience of the incentive to maintain AP mines as a weapons capability decline because of a shift in their security environment. The end of the Cold War was a systemic shock that corresponded with the resolution of many of the civil wars occurring in these countries (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). This allowed other incentives to take greater precedence in the balance of pressure — such as the material incentives of support for demining and other development efforts and moral incentives not to incur civilian harm to their own citizenry. These governments found advocates and willing partners in humanitarian NGOs working on demining efforts, which framed the issue and coordinated an international messaging campaign that gained the support of more powerful, better resourced countries — the United States, initially, and as focus shifted toward a total ban, Canada and the core group. Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, a systemic shock altered moderated

⁷Bower maps the links between UN member states, intergovernmental organizations, and major NGOs, including the ICRC and ICBL. Edges denote the transmission of “direct communication (including transmission of ideas, values, or technical information) and material transactions (principally financial assistance) between nodes that specifically concern mine ban policy” (Bower 2016, 177).

pressures sufficiently to unstick a stalled normative shift.

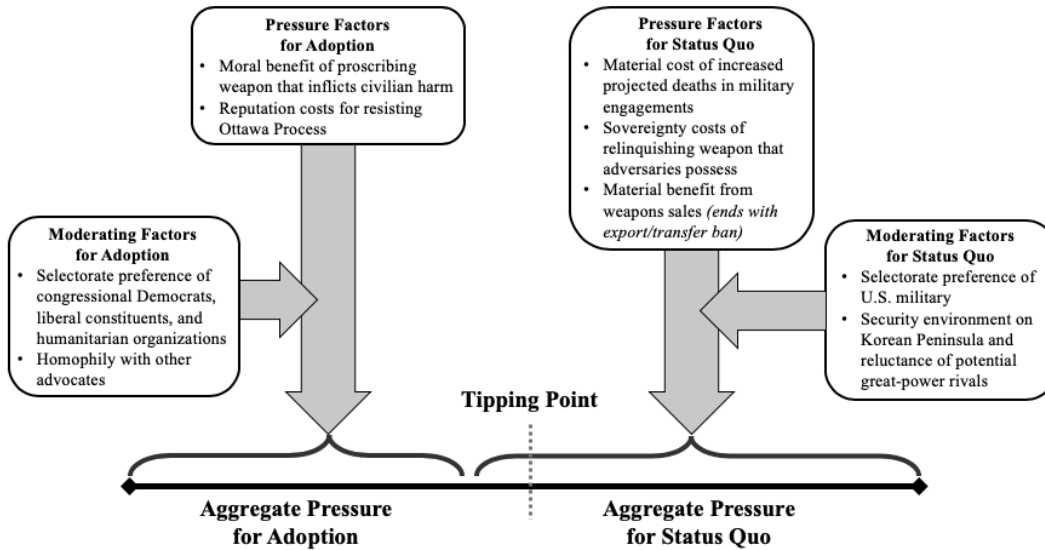


Figure 3: The figure maps several significant pressure and moderating factors that affected the U.S. decision not to sign the Ottawa Treaty. The pressure to adopt did not surpass the pressure to maintain at least limited use of AP mines.

Spreading support for the normative shift introduced new pressure factors and moderated others. Reputation costs for maintaining the status quo increased, and were made legible by lists of “good” and “bad” states maintained by the ICBL (Lawson et al. 1998). As more states joined the Ottawa Process, the separate negotiating track and its goal of a total ban gained more legitimacy, amplifying the pressure to participate and adopt the new norm. Some countries were particularly susceptible to status-based pressure. Eastern European countries applying to join the European Union joined the Ottawa Process to increase their status among European countries, and with it their likelihood of accession through signaling that they shared the values of their prospective peers (Long and Hindle 1998). In the Czech Republic and Poland, where the defense industry manufactured AP mines, this status pressure overcame material incentives to maintain the status quo. The European countries that ultimately chose not to sign the Ottawa Treaty were each cases in which the salience of security concerns had not declined sufficiently to shift the balance of pressure from the status quo: Finland remained concerned about securing its border with Russia, and Yugoslavia and Turkey were both still concerned about internal conflicts (Long and Hindle 1998).

Shifts in the balance of pressure are clearer when the black box is opened and domestic pressures considered. Within the United States, competing pressures were evident. Leahy was an early proponent of a total ban and Clinton a consistent advocate of shifting the norm to significantly proscribe AP mine use. This shift from the status quo was facilitated by the shifting security environment after the Cold War, but there were limits to the extent this reduced threat perception moved the balance of pressure in the United

States. In particular, the U.S. government — particularly the U.S. military — remained concerned about material security incentives, touting studies that indicated possible engagements would result in greater U.S. casualties without the deployment of AP mines (Price 1998). These concerns were moderated by the United States’ remaining security commitments and threat assessments, which informed the proposals raised by U.S. negotiators at the September 1997 conference in Oslo where the treaty text was finalized. At the Oslo conference, the United States requested an exception be made for securing the border between North and South Korea, where the end of the Cold War had not alleviated U.S. threat perceptions, and that the treaty’s entry into force be made conditional on the participation of the most powerful states and the most prolific producers of landmines — specifically, U.S. delegates proposed that entry into force be contingent on the participation of 75 percent of the countries that have historically produced landmines and all five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (Tepe 2012). This would have necessitated commitments from any potential rivals before the United States would be bound by the treaty’s terms.⁸ The U.S. proposal was rejected and the United States declined to sign the treaty, but the Clinton administration acknowledged the norm with an affirmation of its support for a more limited normative shift.

Selectorate pressures pulled the Clinton administration in both directions. Certainly, there was considerable civil-society advocacy in support of the Ottawa Process; many of the NGOs involved in the ICBL were based in the United States, and several major newspapers, including *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, condemned the administration’s rejection of the treaty (Wareham 1998). But some of the most influential pressures came from within the government itself. On the adoption side of the ledger, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright advocated a ban on humanitarian grounds in confidential correspondence with other military and cabinet officials that was leaked to the *New York Times* in March 1996 (Wareham 1998). Considerable pressure was also exerted by the U.S. Congress, but as the Ottawa Process progressed, this became divided between support for a total ban and a more limited approach. Leahy had rallied unanimous, bipartisan support for the moratorium legislation in 1992, but a subsequent bill that he introduced in July 1997 that plotted a course to a unilateral ban on the use of AP mines met strong resistance from Republicans and the Department of Defense (Wareham 1998). The U.S. military’s opposition to a total ban — or, put in the theory’s terms, their opposition to a sovereignty cost that would have placed an internationally imposed constraint on their range of options — was influential in the Clinton administration’s ultimate decision. Clinton told advocates that he had acceded to concerns raised by a military review of landmine policy because “he couldn’t afford a rupture with the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” and during the crucial

⁸Great-power competition was also the justification used by the Trump administration when, in 2020, it changed U.S. landmine policy to allow combatant commanders to propose the use of landmines outside the Korean Peninsula (DeYoung and Sonne 2020). The Biden administration reverted to the previous U.S. policy of non-use with an exception for Korea in June 2022 (Ryan 2022).

Oslo negotiations pressure from the State Department to reach a compromise was checked by threats from the Joint Chiefs to make public their opposition to the administration's policy (Wareham 1998).

Compare the balance of pressure in the United States to that in the United Kingdom, where the policy debate was similar. There, too, the military opposed giving up its AP mine arsenal and argued for the effectiveness of the weapons (Tepe 2012). In the early stages of the Ottawa Process, John Major's Conservative government shared the military's reservations, and was under pressure from Washington, particularly the U.S. military, which warned that a blanket ban on AP mines would affect cooperation within NATO (Wareham 1998; Evans and Norton-Taylor 1999). But this balance of pressure shifted on account of at least two factors. First, a Labour government was elected in May 1997, while negotiations on the treaty were underway. The new government had campaigned on a "moral foreign policy" and was more responsive to humanitarian NGOs and their supporters — in other words, these groups figured more prominently in the new government's selectorate than they did in the selectorate of the previous administration (Long and Hindle 1998; Tepe 2012). Tony Blair's government quickly signaled that it would support a total ban; when France made a similar shift after the election of a Socialist government in June 1997, European policy hardened around the Ottawa Process and the United States became more isolated, having lost the support of its partners on the U.N. Security Council and key NATO allies (Long and Hindle 1998). Second, the sudden death of Princess Diana in August 1997 amplified her advocacy for an international AP mine ban. Public support for the ban became widespread in the United Kingdom as Diana's moral suasion was given new resonance and the overwhelming preference of British constituents was made evident to the government (Tepe 2012). The British government signed the treaty in December 1997.

6.3 Summary

The norms regarding AP mine use were largely frozen from World War II until the 1990s, despite decades of advocacy from prominent organizations, such as the ICRC. However, the end of the Cold War provided an international shock that unstuck a static norm. The changing security environment after the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent decline of many interstate wars altered state actors' incentives and allowed a normative shift to occur. During this period of contestation, states with strong security concerns, material incentives to maintain production and export of AP mines, and the power to resist foreign pressure maintained the status quo — in the cases of Russia and China, these incentives have been strong enough (and disincentives, such as reputation costs, weak enough) that they have still not adopted a normative shift. Other countries, though, competed with one another over the extent to which the norm should change. Despite its centrality in the international network and early advocacy for a moderate shift in norms

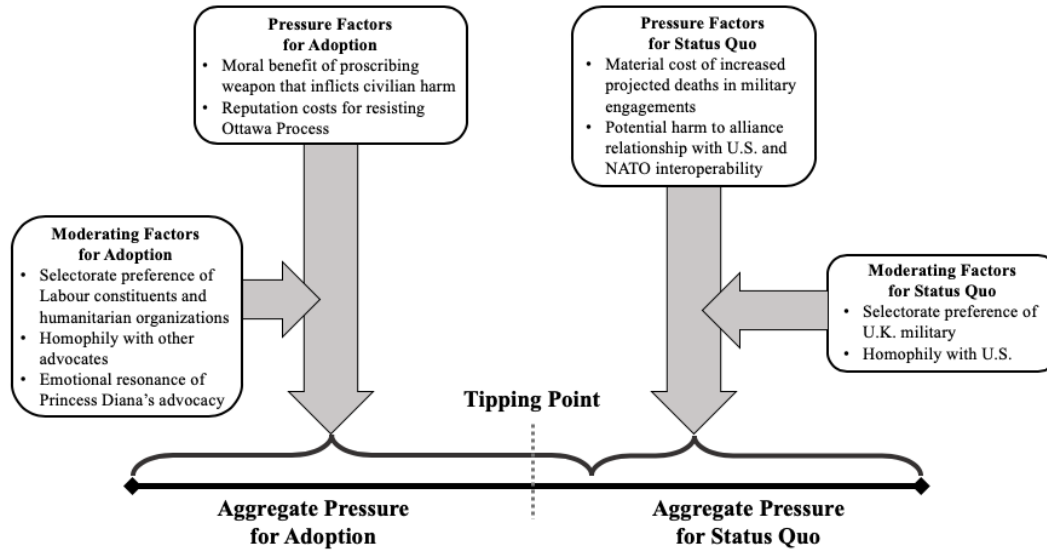


Figure 4: The figure illustrates several significant pressure and moderating factors that affected the U.K. decision to sign the Ottawa Treaty. Though under significant pressure from the United States, the greater role of humanitarian groups in the Labour government's selectorate and the amplifying effect of Princess Diana's death on her mine-ban advocacy tilted the United Kingdom toward adoption.

on landmine use, the United States was eventually outflanked by advocates of a total ban. This network of middle and small powers working in coordination with NGOs was effective because they were able to build cohesive, regional pockets of support that could reinforce one another and insulate themselves from U.S. pressure. This combined with changes in domestic pressures — like the conveniently timed shifts in the selectorate preferences of the United Kingdom and France. This confluence of pressure tipped the balance in key states toward support for a total ban — which, in turn, further reinforced the support network, increased the legitimacy of the norm, and increased the reputation costs for refusing to adopt.

7 Conclusion

Research on norm diffusion has produced a valuable literature that theorizes key tenets of this process and numerous case studies that illustrate the significance of specific features of diffusion. However, it has missed important and relevant insights regarding the structure of networks and the ways in which structure interacts with diffusion mechanisms. Consideration of how different network structures and types of pressure and moderating factors can help explain spatial and temporal variation in diffusion patterns. This article has tried to synthesize this research into a coherent theory for conceptualizing a complex process. For hegemonic diffusion patterns, the theory offers an explanation for why and how a norm can spread from the core to the periphery of the international system. But it also offers an explanation for why and how diffusion can

spread from and through the periphery, in waves, or not at all.

The theory is a map that can help researchers as they consider what factors matter in specific instances of diffusion, and in particular, what factors might be underappreciated in a given case. But it can also be a diagnostic for norm entrepreneurs. While many advocates have a strong understanding of what messages are effective with which audiences, often gained through first-hand experience, the theory provides a framework for considering when and why organizing regional conferences can be effective, how their advocacy communicates incentives and disincentives for adoption, and the way that moderating factors may alter how these messages are received. Advocates must prioritize finite resources of time, money, and effort. An appreciation of states' positions in the international network and of subnational groups' positions within states' selectorates, and how this informs states' policies to implement and institutionalize norms, can help advocates better prioritize their efforts for promoting emerging norms and overcoming obstacles that have arrested norm diffusion.

Additional research could build on these insights. Dyadic data is becoming increasingly available, opening up new avenues for the analysis of international networks (e.g., Duque 2018, Moyer, Burrows and Van Manan 2018). This data can be used for quantitative empirical analyses of the role of network structure in diffusion processes, particularly reassessing the significance of degree centrality and localized clustering. The moderated pressure component could lend itself to formal modeling or be quantified for studies of specific instances of norm or policy diffusion; particularly, attention to variations in moderated pressure within the selectorate may help explain notable cases of early or late adoption. Additional research could also explore how different structures and pressures relate to the internalization and robustness of norms — it is possible that the social reinforcement produced by network density and certain combinations of moderated pressure may result in more robust norms than other network structures and pressures. Work in this vein could extend our collective understanding of the significant variation in how norms start, how they spread, and how they persist.

8 Declarations

8.1 Funding Declaration

The author does not have funding to declare.

8.2 Competing Interests Declaration

The author does not have any conflicts of interest to declare.

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