**Appendix B: Study brief with feedback**

**How are transnational advocacy networks shaping the emerging global discourse on human rights, and, more importantly, challenging IR theory?**

[Student’s name]

With the growing importance of non-state actors in global politics, it is becoming increasingly apparent in contemporary international relations that the nation-state is no longer the sole operational unit. Traditional IR theories that see the state as a black box and focus on the anarchic nature of the international realm lose much of their explanatory and predictive power when attempting to analyze the role of these actors. Transnational advocacy networks (TANs) are one type of non-state actor whose prominence has expanded rapidly in recent decades. They are defined, according to Keck and Sikkink as “networks of activists, distinguishable largely by the centrality of principled ideas or values in motivating their formation.” Mertus adds that they “shape collective life [and] are not confined to the territorial and institutional spaces of states.” These networks are significant transnationally, regionally and domestically and by building links among actors operating at these levels, they multiply opportunities for dialogue and exchange. They are thus “key contributors to a convergence of social and cultural norms able to support processes of regional and international integration.” (Keck & Sikkink) By blurring the boundaries of a state’s relations with its own citizens and the relationship individuals and states themselves have to the international system, advocacy networks are helping to transform the practice of national sovereignty and international cooperation.

TANs present a further challenge to dominant IR theories through their non-material motivations and noncompliance with professional and institutional norms. They further defy these norms by exerting power and influence through non-traditional channels. (Keck & Sikkink) At the core of this process is information exchange, that is, mobilizing information strategically to create new issues and to persuade, pressurize and gain leverage over more traditionally powerful organizations or governments. Another mechanism employed, in which the global is translated into the local, is framing issues to fit into a certain institutional and cultural context that appeals to a mass audience, or, according to McAdam: consciously and strategically ‘fashioning shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action.’ (McAdam in Keck and Sikkink) TANs are the key vehicles for the horizontal development of norms on an international level, their diffusion through regional and national channels and the political and cultural negotiation that is required for their local implementation. Therefore, the growing prominence of TANs challenges dominant IR theories through the introduction of non-state actors who exert influence in the absence of traditional power/capabilities and who defy the logic of anarchy through international cooperation.

These challenges to traditional IR theory provide the opportunity for the development of a compelling alternative theoretical perspective. While the theoretical development and incorporation of transnational advocacy networks into IR theory is still in its infancy, Sikkink argues that their inclusion makes the divide between international relations and comparative politics increasingly artificial. She also implicates the introduction of network theory from sociology as potentially analytically useful. The theoretical apparatus she outlines draws on “sociological traditions that focus on complex interactions among actors, on the intersubjective construction of frames of meaning, and on the negotiation and malleability of identities and interests.” (Keck & Sikkink) Constructivists in IR and social movement theorists in comparative politics have also touched upon this development. While the interests of TANs are important in achieving outcomes, they aren’t exogenously given, they are mutually constitutive of the development of global and local cultural and historical norms. According the Keck and Sikkink, TANs take into account incentives, constraints, strategies and rules that exist at an international level, yet also work to change these institutions through the diffusion of norms in both the international and local spheres. They also embody elements of agency and structure simultaneously and thus employ a dialectical strategy of norm implementation between the global and the local. ‘States are embedded in [these] dense networks of transnational and international social relations that shape their perceptions of the world and their role in the world. States are socialized to want certain things by the international society in which they and the people in them live.’ (Finnermore in Keck and Sikkink) This theory can be expanded to apply not only to TANs, but the formation of other transnational groups. Mertus argues that the globalization and homogenization of culture can result in the fragmentation of localized ethno-national groups as a response to perceived dominance of outside cultures. As a survival tactic in an increasingly interconnected world, economic, social and cultural networks form to promote their own collective interests, independent of national borders. This retrenchment and reactive nationalism can lead to human rights abuses. (Mertus) Thus “aggressive forms of contemporary nationalism are made within global terms of identity and shaped by local particularities.” (Mertus) International terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda are an example of this as is ethnic fractionalization throughout the developing world. Thus, it is not only in the increased activity of TANs to which this theory can be applied, but on a broader basis to offer compelling explanations for transnational advocacy networks as a whole, in which the state is incorporated and conditioned.

In terms of how TANs have shaped the discourse on human rights, they have facilitated the connection of domestic and international politics and thus created an international dialogue on human rights. They draw on a multitude of resources and implement them strategically to affect the relations between states and international organizations, as outlined above. In the case of human rights, TANs may be comprised of international and domestic NGOs, research and advocacy organizations, social movements, foundations, the media, intergovernmental organizations, parts of the government and various groups within civil society. (Keck & Sikkink) International NGOs, however, play a central role in that their exclusive purpose is often to facilitate and connect these various actors. They have emerged in cases where domestic channels between citizens and their government are blocked and thus are no longer an option for conflict-resolution. (Keck & Sikkink) For example, when there is no legal or institutional path for checking the government’s treatment of its citizens, TANs will emerge and link domestic activists with external ones. These networks will then employ information, ideas and strategies to alter the information and value context within which states make policies. Keck and Sikkink outline a typology of how these methods are specifically employed. Information politics involves quickly and credibly dispersing information to where it will be most effective (in either the domestic or international sphere) and incorporates not only hard facts, but testimonies, that are used to frame issues simply so they are accessible to a wide audience. In this sense, governments are no longer able to monopolize information flows. Symbolic politics uses the power of symbols to further frame issues and catalyze the growth of networks. Leverage politics involves employing information and symbolic politics to raise the profile and legitimacy of the network and issue at hand to lobby more powerful actors in the international system who can then employ economic or military power. In human rights cases, this has been employed in the conditional distribution of aid by the US/EU according to human rights compliance of national governments. Moral leverage has also been used successfully when abusive governments who place a high value on international prestige have been subjected to intense international scrutiny. Finally, accountability politics occurs when more powerful actors accept or endorse certain international agreements and are obliged to act on these vague policies for reasons of accountability.

While these channels are open to them, have TANs actually been effective in shaping the emerging global discourse on human rights? One of the most successful areas TANs operate in is agenda setting and drawing attention to new issues. This often involves ‘a modification of the value-context in which policy debates take place.’ (Keck & Sikkink) Grugel & Peruzzotti outline the case of children’s rights in Argentina as a successful example of this modification. The Argentinean government’s ratification of the CRC led to the mobilization of a network comprised of NGOs and local civil society organizations and the introduction of a contradictory conception of the rights of the child from traditional cultural conceptions that eventually led to the adoption of legislation compliant with the CRC. However, there is skepticism within the literature on the effectiveness of TANs as to whether the pressure exerted by such networks has led to concrete behavioral outcomes. Keck and Sikkink phrase the effectiveness of networks in terms of stages of impact, arguing that incremental concessions by governments in response to TAN pressure can lead to increased government vulnerability and eventual success. Hafner-Burton, on the other hand argues that many of the tactics of TANs lead to governments substituting certain human rights violations for other less visible ones so that their overall improvement is negligible. Therefore, while TANs have no doubt drawn greater attention to human rights issues in recent decades and presented a challenge to traditional theories of IR in the process, the extent of their empirical effectiveness, and thus, their true importance to the international system, remains contentious.