Part 3
International Arenas
Conflict over gay rights has been a key battleground in America’s culture wars for decades. Although much of the social science literature focuses on the gay rights movement, there is of course a powerful rival: a movement of social conservatives that has played a strong role as the conflict has swirled across local, state, and national arenas. Less well known, the conflict is international. There are parallel battles over gay rights in other states, and international organizations are heavily involved.

This chapter highlights the latter aspect of the international fight, focusing on the United Nations. Although the UN does not issue binding international law, its policies have considerable symbolic value and real political influence. With its universal membership and broad policy ambit, the UN is not representative of most international organizations. However, its importance in international affairs justifies examining it here, as a key example of how international organizations act as arenas.

In the UN, two “compound players” clash with one another: a transnational network of gay rights proponents; and its foe, a transnational network of traditional religious believers. Like other compound players, both networks include diverse organizational and individual components, in this case foundations, media, individuals, and sometimes governmental officials. At moments when policy decisions are made, having such officials in a network is often of great importance. But the most constant members of the two rival networks are non-governmental organizations (NGOs), acting as steady advocates for or against gay rights. As with other compound players, the members of each network sometimes work together but more frequently act autonomously, albeit with broadly shared goals. In addition, they often compete with one another for members, resources, and influence, part of the general competition for organizational survival critical to every NGO (Bob, 2005). For this reason, in this chapter I focus

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1 This chapter is based on research conducted for my book, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (Bob, 2012), and the empirical section draws heavily from that book. *The Global Right Wing* also includes a chapter analyzing transnationalized clashes over gay rights in Sweden and Romania.
most of my attention on the NGOs within each network, treating them as
the primary “players.” In addition, rather than highlighting conflict within
the networks, I devote this chapter to exploring how the NGO players in
each promote their goals in the UN arena. As will become clear, in addition
to examining affirmative strategies, I pay particular attention to ways in
which the players seek to advance their goals by undermining players in
the rival network.

The following section briefly describes the UN as an “arena.” Next, I
analyze how the gay and anti-gay rights networks conflict with one another
using a variety of strategies and exploiting institutional characteristics of
the UN arena. In the conclusion, I draw out broader implications of using
the players and arenas approach, particularly in the common situation that
rival players clash with one another.

The UN Arena

As an arena, the UN has several characteristics which it shares with other
international organizations and to some extent with other types of arenas.
First, it is fundamentally an arena composed of players (member states)
who at least in theory and often in fact control its operations, decisions,
and policies. Usually this is done through consensus procedures or, in
some cases, majority voting by states. In addition, other entities, par-
ticularly NGOs, may act as players, seeking to influence states and the
UN bureaucracy. NGOs may gain two forms of formal UN recognition,
consultative or roster status, allowing them easy access to the UN but no
voting privileges. Additionally or alternatively, they may influence the UN
from outside, by generating public pressure, influencing states in other
arenas, or other means. Frequently too, NGOs, as well as states, become
parts of larger advocacy networks on particular issues. These networks
are loosely tied compound players that act not only in the UN but also
in other arenas, where developments may then be used to promote goals
back in the UN.

Second, like many other arenas and particularly like other international
organizations, the UN includes a number of discrete but inter-related sub-
arenas of varying power and importance. These offer a variety of sites in
which players contend and interact with one another. Even the weaker sub-
arenas sometimes offer considerable possibilities for states, NGOs, or others
to advance political agendas. At the UN, these sub-arenas include well-
known organs such as the Security Council, General Assembly, Secretariat
and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); specialized bureaucracies and quasi-judicial entities within these organs, such as ECOSOC’s Human Rights Council or the Secretariat’s Department of Disarmament Affairs; and allied organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization or World Health Organization.

Third, within each of these sub-arenas, players’ capabilities vary, depending not only on their resources but also on the rules of the sub-arena. For instance, in the UN General Assembly, every country receives an equal vote, whereas in the Security Council, the five permanent members (the world’s most powerful nations at the UN’s founding in 1945) each may exercise a veto over decisions. Fourth, UN bureaucracies exercise considerable autonomy in issuing recommendations and distributing resources, notwithstanding ultimate oversight by member states. On many issues, state opinions are divided, offering UN officials the ability to act as players – that is, as advocates for policies that the UN might adopt. The Secretary-General is the most important example of this, but at every level of UN officialdom, agencies and individuals can and do act as players. Frequently too they become informal members of the advocacy networks noted above. The broader point is that the UN is far from a neutral arena; it is intrinsically and simultaneously composed of players.

Gay Rights Players

International gay activism began as early as the mid-1970s in conjunction with a global rise in “rights culture.” As policies toward homosexuals improved within states, particularly in northern Europe and parts of the Americas, gay groups began working overseas and in international arenas such as the UN. A key player was the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). Founded in 1978 and headquartered in Brussels, by 2010 ILGA included over 670 NGOs from over 110 countries. (As such, like many of the compound players discussed in this chapter, ILGA is also an arena.) Coordinating transnational advocacy and supporting national campaigns, ILGA conducts research, publishes reports, and holds conferences. At the UN, it alerts local members about relevant policies, encourages home state lobbying, and facilitates members’ participation.

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) is another major player. Begun in 1990 as a one-room office on San Francisco’s Castro Street, by 2008 the group had annual revenues over $1.7 million and 18 staff in New York, Buenos Aires, and Capetown. With a
primary goal of improving gay rights worldwide, IGLHRC helps gay communities facing attack, builds the capacity of local partners, and works for policy change at the UN.

More recent additions to the gay network include Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. For years starting in the late 1970s, both of these major rights NGOs had rejected overtures by homosexual activists. At the time, gay rights were deemed beyond the NGOs' missions and too political. Only in the mid-1990s, after years of discussion, conflict, and pressure, did both groups open new and important programs on sexual rights.

Finally, the gay rights movement includes several major underwriters. Through the 1990s, the Ford Foundation provided much of the money, both for American groups such as IGLHRC and for overseas clients. For European NGOs such as ILGA, the European Union and member governments were major funders. Since 2000, the Arcus Foundation of Kalamazoo, Michigan, and New York City has also become a key supporter of gay activism worldwide.

Why did these and other groups enter the global arena? The decision came only after substantial debate within each player, but a number of factors played a role. First, gay activists, who hail primarily from countries with the most robust rights, seek to backstop domestic gains. In recent years, the UN bureaucracy has generally favored gay rights – indeed, some officials have become gay rights players – even as some member states remain hostile. Just as important is the “quest for recognition” of gay lifestyles (ILGA, 2006). In this, even failures to create new norms or treaties can be useful if they energize broader constituencies. Finally, advocates lobby for international agreements to pressure countries where rights are limited or societal violence rampant.

Anti-Gay Rights Players

As gay players entered the international sphere, religious conservatives opted to play there as well. This occurred despite the fact that some of these organizations have long held the UN in low repute. Given the power, symbolic if nothing else, of the UN, however, the religious groups ultimately came to believe that failing to use the UN would hurt their cause. Having made that decision, many of them have become skilled players, often specializing in efforts to block or derail initiatives of gay players.

Their primary stated goal is preserving “traditional” or “natural” families against the “gendered” family, the concept of “sexual orientation,” and
“homosexual rights.” The network is a compound player, spanning governments, especially socially conservative Islamic, African, and Caribbean nations, as well as the Holy See, which enjoys special status at the UN. Again, however, the most focused participants in the debate are NGOs, most identified with various Christian denominations and most active in a variety of related “family” issues.

A major intellectual and organizational hub is the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society based in Rockford, Illinois. Founded in 1976, the center’s mission is to “defend” the “natural family,” “the fundamental unit of society, not the individual, not the state, not the church, and not the corporation” (Howard Center, 2010). The Center and its biennial World Congress of Families (WCF) have thousands of individual members and 27 partner organizations. Based in the Americas and Europe, with partners such as Focus on the Family, Real Women of Canada, Red Familia (Mexico), and United Families International, WCF members have played central roles in national and international debates over “family” issues.

The Catholic Family & Human Rights Institute (C-FAM), founded in 1997, is another key player (and WCF member). Guided by “fidelity to the teachings of the Church,” C-FAM works to protect the “natural family” by “discrediting socially radical policies” such as recognition of same-sex marriage and even the “sexual orientation” concept itself (C-FAM, 2010). To reach these goals, C-FAM monitors and lobbies international institutions, particularly the UN, involving itself in everything from regular UN meetings to international conferences to treaty negotiations.

UN-Closeting Gay Rights

Given the vehemence of this opposition, gay advocates long avoided a frontal assault on the human rights citadel. Much though they might have preferred an international convention or declaration on gay rights, they were realistic about its dim prospects and took a more modest approach. First, they initially promoted international recognition of the “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” concepts, rather than seek the broader goal of gay rights. Second, they worked to expand interpretation of existing rights to include, implicitly, rights for homosexuals. They also chose to mount both efforts in low-level UN sub-arenas – conferences, quasi-judicial commissions, treaty monitoring bodies, and expert committees where incremental steps might be taken with less chance of raising opposition. The goal was new “norms” or “soft law” – declarations, publications, or rulings lacking the governmental
ratification necessary for international treaties or conventions. Through frequent citation and usage, such statements might nonetheless form the basis for more comprehensive and enforceable “hard law” sometime in the future. Yet, as we shall see, even these closeted approaches drew fire.

The strategy’s first step was wooing potential allies, often at international conferences. These have been a staple UN sub-arena in many issues. They are usually of brief duration but often proclaim non-binding but symbolically important declarations or statements. As early as the 1975 UN Conference on Women in Mexico City, an International Lesbian Caucus formed ties with feminist delegates. Gay rights groups were also active at UN conferences in the 1980s and 1990s, gaining accreditation, making public statements, and winning occasional delegates to the cause. In these venues, gay concerns did not make it explicitly into UN documents. However, vague but potentially inclusive language favored by homosexual advocates sometimes did. For instance, in 1995 the Platform for Action of the Beijing Women’s conference declared that women should “have control over ... their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health” — although it also omitted four proposed references to “sexual orientation” (UN, 1995: Para. 96).

In 2003, Brazil introduced a resolution at another low-level sub-arena, the UN Human Rights Commission within ECOSOC, stating that the “enjoyment” of universal human rights should not be “hindered in any way on the grounds of sexual orientation” (UN, 2003: 1). As discussed below, this resolution drew fierce opposition, failed to garner majority support, and was later withdrawn. More prominently, in the UN General Assembly in late 2008, France introduced a statement (requiring no vote) urging that states “commit to promote and protect the human rights of all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity” (UN, 2008: 1). Joined by 66 states, the statement also drew vehement opposition led by Syria, speaking for the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now Organization of Islamic Cooperation) (OIC) in a counterstatement signed by 57 states.

Outside the UN, one related effort to build “soft law” is worth noting. In 2006, two NGOs favoring gay rights, International Service for Human Rights and the International Commission of Jurists, gathered a distinguished and sympathetic set of experts to draft the Yogyakarta Principles. These claim to be “a universal guide to human rights which affirm binding international legal standards with which all States must comply” (ISHR and ICJ, 2006). Among the 29 principles and hundreds of directives, Yogyakarta holds that states must “embody ... equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity” in their constitutions or laws and must “ensure” that “freedom of opinion and expression” does not violate the
“rights and freedoms of persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities” (ISHR and ICJ, 2006: Prins. 2, 3, 19). Since their promulgation, the Principles have repeatedly been cited by gay rights players – and denounced by foes – in the UN and other arenas.

In sum, gay activists at the UN have a mixed record. They have won new governmental backing for their cause. Most of these allies support the concepts of “sexual orientation” and “gay rights” – and both ideas are far better known internationally than decades ago. But the UN as a body has not recognized gay rights, and even the concept of sexual orientation remains controversial there. As we shall see, conflict envelopes an array of issues, from process to participation to substance.

**Protesting Process**

Opposition begins with denunciations of rights advocates’ core strategies. Far from accepting or overlooking incremental methods in low-level UN sub-arenas, religious conservatives disparage them as “an attempt by activists to present an aspirational, radical social policy vision as a binding norm” (Tozzi, 2007: 1). In this view, lobbying in obscure UN forums and grafting existing international treaties onto new issues are nothing more than cunning “maneuver[s]” to “by-pass ratification and avoid ... confrontations” with states having “contrary ... national cultures and religious values” (Women for Faith & Family, 1999). Even the more open strategy pioneered by the 2003 Brazilian resolution provokes critique, less as to process than the uses to which such non-binding statements might be put. In this view, UN “soft law” has no legal value even if “dishonest” activists improperly exploit self-constructed “norms” to bootstrap their causes forward (Sylva and Yoshihara, 2007: 19).

But conservatives have learned that seeking to delegitimize “soft law” after the fact – or lambasting international institutions themselves – leaves them on the defensive. Faced with the threat that “international norms are beginning to shape the content of domestic law ... [and] being used to deconstruct long-standing notions of family life,” conservative players are now engaging “in efforts to avoid negative outcomes and promote positive ones” (Wilkins, 2007: 370). As we shall see, part of this involves fighting all aspects of gay rights initiatives at the UN. In addition, conservative groups use UN sub-arenas preemptively, to construct and strengthen their own rival norms. A key example occurred in 2004 when conservative activists, working with Qatar, hosted their own international conference, endorsed
beforehand by a UN resolution. The conference resulted in the Doha Declaration, affirming the “right of men and women” only to marry and the family as the “natural and fundamental group unit of society ... entitled to protection by society and the State” (2004). In short, the Doha sub-arena created a direct competitor to the “soft law” produced by women’s and gay rights groups at their own conferences. This made it more difficult to distinguish which of many competing statements in fact constituted a “new” norm. As one activist boasted, the Doha Conference and Declaration “take their place in the canon of declarations, platforms, and agendas from which international legal norms are derived by political leaders, judges, and lawyers” (Wilkins, 2007: 370).

**Excluding and Expelling Players**

No gay groups appear to have attended the Doha conference, making for a harmonious meeting. By contrast, most UN events on these issues are riven by conflict. Although conservative players often object to the processes and outcomes, they today participate as gamely as their adversaries. Indeed, the rival networks follow parallel tactics aimed at gaining advantage over one another. These begin with efforts to restrict their opponents’ participation in the UN. For activist groups, a key step to a formal if weak UN role is ECOSOC consultative status. In theory, gaining it is a routine matter, involving a brief application, perfunctory screening, and long-term status. Yet when it comes to homosexuality and other controversial issues, even the threshold question – Who participates? – draws fire.

In 1993, ILGA applied for and obtained consultative status, a historic moment for its members. But jubilation soon turned to tribulation as Christian soldiers took to the warpath in two other arenas, the US Congress and broader American society. Their battle cry, bellowed in fundraising letters and blasted on prime-time news: ILGA must be ousted because its network included a pedophilia peddler, the North American Man Boy Love Association (NAMBLA).

Within months, Congress unanimously passed a law withholding $119 million from the UN pending presidential certification that the UN accredited no organizations promoting pedophilia. President Bill Clinton hastily signed the bill into law.

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2 This and the next two paragraphs are based in part on Gamson (1997).
The effect on ILGA was traumatic – as gleefully expected by conservatives who gloated over its coming “bind”: “If it kicks out NAMBLA, it’s hypocritical, if not it supports sex between boys and men!” (The Report, quoted in Gamson, 1997: 183-184). Unsurprisingly (except to NAMBLA), ILGA engaged in intense internal debate over NAMBLA’s membership. In June 1994, ILGA expelled NAMBLA and two other groups. In addition, ILGA changed its membership procedures. Within two years, it implemented a tough, four-step screening process to ensure that no group like NAMBLA would be admitted in the future. Most fundamentally, key members of the homosexual community redefined the very boundaries of gay identity, with America’s largest advocacy group, the Human Rights Campaign Fund, bluntly stating, “NAMBLA is not a gay organization” (King, quoted in Gamson, 1997: 179, 185).

Despite all this, ECOSOC suspended ILGA in September 1994. The group had neglected to rid itself of a small German NGO that promoted decriminalization of pedophilia. Too late, ILGA re-emphasized its new identity by throwing out the Germans. It then waited five years to reapply for consultative status but was repeatedly rejected based on the earlier scandal. Tarred with the same feather, other players such as IGLHRC were harried at UN conferences. Only in 2006 did ECOSOC finally grant consultative status to ILGA-Europe.

Such efforts to exclude players from the UN, with their serious effects on gay groups’ structures, rules, and identities, are not exclusive to conservatives. Gay advocates have followed similar approaches, though without such signal successes. Human Rights Watch has griped that foes such as C-FAM “oppose the U.N. and all international human rights mechanisms” (Human Rights Watch, 2005: 84). The implication seems clear: such NGOs do not deserve consultative status and should play no role in the arena. In related cases, this has in fact come to pass. In the early 1990s, Human Life International’s (HLI) application failed due to its “hostility to a whole field of UN activity,” family planning (Willetts, 1996: 4, 37). After C-FAM’s UN acceptance, it too faced accusations about its close relationship to HLI and alleged enmity to the UN. But these revelations, published by Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) (now Catholics for Choice), an NGO supporting abortion, feminism, and gay rights, failed to catch fire.

CFFC, whose own application for consultative status came under fire from the Holy See in 1998, returned the favor in 1999 after it gained accreditation. It launched its ongoing “See Change” campaign to strip Rome of its special UN status. Since 1964, the Holy See has been a “non-member state
permanent observer” – a position unique to any religious representative. In this capacity, it enjoys most rights accorded states – far more than NGOs in consultative status. The See Change campaign aims to reduce the Vatican to NGO status, but it too has gained little traction. For its part, C-FAM launched its own countercampaign defending the Holy See’s status. To date, the Vatican retains its unusual seat at the UN where it has been a leader of the conservative network on family issues.

The broader point remains, however. Key players seek to use UN arenas not only for advancing their own agendas, but also for preventing their opponents from setting foot there or by hobbling their foes at every turn. In this, even the UN’s relatively undemanding entry rules can be exploited, or external pressure may be exerted to sway UN decisions.

Coalition-Building – and Unbuilding

Beyond raising participation barriers, the rival players attack one another directly at the UN. Coalition-building, a central strategy to advance one’s cause by creating more powerful compound players, joins with a darker twin – undermining the enemy. As one part of this, the contending players denounce one another’s networks, casting funders and other supporters in sinister light. To take one of numerous examples, C-FAM’s Austin Ruse wrote in 2000,

[Enormous American foundations which are very radical in their world view ... put direct pressure on governments to change their laws and vote a certain way on UN resolutions. ... Their agenda is a leftist – even Marxist – agenda of what some call the “new class” who think they know better than what tradition has taught us from the dawn of time ... Specifically, they want the family to include homosexual couples, and make abortion a universally recognised “human right.” (Ruse, 2000)]

In addition to such rhetorical swipes, conservatives labor to undermine opposition players directly. For instance, to deter developing countries from joining with “radical” NGOs and European governments, they have stoked anti-colonial sentiments. More generally, they stir “the resentment that heavy-handed pushing of novel norms generates in much of the world” (C-FAM, 2010).

Of course, these coalition bashers have engaged in their own networking. Most strikingly, even as they decry gay groups’ dependence on “socialist”
governments, conservative protestants and Catholics have joined with conservative Islamic states to form a kind of “Baptist-burqa” coalition. Forged in the fires of the 1990s UN women’s conferences, this compound player has endured for years. Indeed, C-FAM has urged formation of a “permanent UN pro-family bloc,” predicting that “our victory will come” from this “potent alliance between Catholic and Muslim countries, ... new in the world, new to history,” what “[o]ur enemies call ... an un-holy alliance” (Ruse, 1999).

But again, building these ties is only half the story. Gay advocates have worked hard to impugn them. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has highlighted the “irony” of the “odd alliance” between Christian conservatives and repressive Muslim states such as Egypt (Human Rights Watch, 2005: 83-84). Together the coalition “open[s] space for attacking human rights principles themselves – as not universal but ‘foreign,’ as not protectors of diversity but threats to sovereignty, and as carriers of cultural perversion” (Human Rights Watch, 2005: 71). Such rhetoric may inflame HRW’s constituents, but probably has little effect on its foes. More vexingly for conservative players, however, the network has suffered costly “defections,” as the gay rights activists have expanded their work to multiple arenas simultaneously (C-FAM, 2010). Even in Catholic majority countries in southern Europe and Latin America, the gay rights movements has advanced, often with the support of ILGA, IGLHRC, or various organs of the European Union and Council of Europe. In turn, these countries become advocates for gay rights at the UN.

In sum, attacks on the composition of enemy players are powerful weapons in activist arsenals. At times, the volleys have their effects, forcing changes in players’ structures, strategies, and even identities. Even when that does not occur, players are forced to devote scarce resources to defending themselves, thereby weakening their more affirmative actions.

Sexual Orientation – or Disorientation?

Beyond attacking process, participation, and partnering, the opposing networks clash over substance, deploying rival authorities to press core claims and undermine opponents. In this, the very nature of homosexuality, rights, and religion are tumbled into the crucible, forcing each side to spend precious resources fighting battles they had thought won long ago. For gay groups, “sexual orientation” is an innate if variable aspect of human nature. Supporting this view are scientific societies led by the American Psychological Association, although its shifting positions on the issue now seem to have settled into a compromise – that “nature and nurture both
play complex roles” (APA, 2008: 2). Promoting nature with consummate certainty are moral authorities like South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu who has intoned that, just as black people were made to suffer “for something we could do nothing about – our very skins. It is the same with sexual orientation. It is a given” (Tutu, 2004).

But those opposing the “homosexual agenda” have disputed and defamed the very concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity. Against Brazil’s UN resolution, for instance, United Families International (UFI) bandied a “wealth of peer reviewed social science data” claiming that homosexuality is nothing more than a “lifestyle choice,” a “passing social trend,” or a “fad” presenting grave “dangers” to “individuals, families, and societies” (Allred, 2005). In 2008, the OIC similarly condemned France’s joint statement to the UN General Assembly supporting rights for all people regardless of sexual orientation. The Holy See also opposes, arguing that the concepts of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” have “no recognition or clear and agreed definition in international law” (Holy See, 2008).

Gay advocates dismiss the foregoing arguments as misinterpretation, pseudo-science, or prejudice. For instance, in answer to smearing of the sexual orientation concept, HRW has urged that it be defined narrowly – “as understood in ordinary speech” (Human Rights Watch, 2005: 86). But, again, this effort takes a toll not only on gay players’ resources but also on their ability to attract support.

Rights: Equal or Special?

As noted above, a central goal of gay groups is equal rights. A matter of simple justice, explicit rights protection at the UN would create legal tools helping millions. In this view, sexual orientation and gender identity should never form the basis for discrimination. For its part, the UN should lead the way toward repeal or change of biased laws and cultural attitudes.

For conservatives, however, the idea that same-sex attraction, let alone marriage, should be acknowledged as a right is anathema. Because opponents do not recognize the concept of “sexual orientation,” no rights can be grounded in it. Rather, as activists argued in fighting the Brazilian resolution, claims to gay “rights” constitute “special human rights (rather than equal human rights),” aimed at protecting a behavior, indeed a perversion, rather than a status (Allred, 2005). Worse still, as the Vatican argues at the UN, purporting to make conventional marriage “juridically equivalent to radically different forms of union” will “in reality harm [marriage] and contribute to its destabilization” (Benedict, 2006).
Whatever the merits of these arguments, there is little question that repulsing them costs gay activists scarce time and resources. More worryingly these and more personal attacks may lead to self-censorship and deter potential allies from joining publicly with the movement, weakening the gay cause at the UN.

**Culture: Established or Evolving?**

So even while defending bedrock empirical and normative propositions, gay groups have turned the tables, working to undermine their foes’ fundamental beliefs. Most important, they have attacked “traditional” understandings of religion, whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or Jewish, as narrow and cramped. As one sally, gay rights proponents parade religious liberals at UN conferences and other sub-arenas. There they directly challenge orthodox views, their presence and statements embodying more open, faith-based values. Catholics for Free Choice exemplifies this strategy at the UN.

Outside the UN, gay activists enlist players whose eminence rivals the Pope’s – then deploy them to influence UN debates. In 2006, the Dalai Lama issued a statement at activists’ request, opposing ‘violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and urge[ing] respect, tolerance, and the full recognition of human rights for all” (Dalai Lama, quoted in Sanders, 2006). More vocal still, Desmond Tutu has called persecution of homosexuals “every bit as unjust as that crime against humanity, apartheid” (Tutu, 2004).

Adopting a parallel but deeper strategy, the Arcus Foundation runs a program aimed at “refut[ing] beliefs that portray gay … people as sinful and immoral,” “achieving long-term change in cultural attitudes and religious institutions” and “creating a positive shift in cultural attitudes and values toward sexuality in general and GLBT … issues in particular” (2007). If such changes occur, as they already have in certain religions and countries, this would further affect state attitudes at the UN.

**Outcomes**

Whether or not these long-term strategies bear fruit, the result of opposition, both state and non-governmental, has so far been non-policy at the UN. As rights scholar Jack Donnelly has observed, “[i]n the short and medium run, there is no chance of anything even close to an international consensus on even a working text for a draft declaration on the rights of homosexuals” (2003, 237). To date, Donnelly’s prediction has held true.
Of course, the gay movement has scored successes in Europe and the Americas, with various forms of gay rights recognized by some states, usually as a result of prolonged contestation within national arenas. But these signal victories are matched by a resurgence of attention to, enforcement of, and enlargement in sodomy laws, especially in parts of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Muslim world, again based primarily on developments within each national arena. On this basis, governments in both camps then act as players at the UN, usually in accordance with the state’s decision on the issue. There, NGO members of the Baptist-burqa network eagerly support their state allies, working strategically to block gay rights or even recognition of such basic concepts as “sexual orientation” and “gender identity.” Because of the UN’s consensus procedures, even states that are relatively weak in capabilities have been able to succeed in this strategy. The result has been stalemate.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the players and arenas perspective, by directing attention to the recurrent clash of networks, provides a useful means of understanding the battle over gay rights at the UN. Rather than highlighting only one side to the conflict and rather than seeking to identify shifting political opportunities, the approach directs attention to strategic interactions among players, as they are affected by the UN arena. As we have seen, both sides advance their goals, using both affirmative and negative tactics. In addition, they creatively and strategically play UN rules and norms, or vault into other arenas where developments may indirectly help them at the UN.

More broadly, studying conflicts among players explains far more about the development, dynamics, and outcomes of activism than can be learned by analyzing only one side. These points jibe with two existing literatures, countermovements theory in sociology and the advocacy coalition framework in policy studies. Both recognize that movements face powerful foes who are themselves movements, and both draw attention to conflict. However, they have been deployed primarily to study interactions within states, especially the United States, not transnationally. More important, the countermovements approach continues to focus primarily on one movement, typically a “progressive” one, viewing countermovements as part of the subject’s “opportunity structure” (Fetner, 2008; Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996). Advocacy coalition analysts avoid this limitation but mostly discuss coalitions’ contrasting
beliefs and their direct effects on policy, rather than the ongoing process by which they conflict with one another (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

By contrast, the approach developed in this chapter expands upon existing ways of understanding movement strategies. Players do not merely scrutinize the current political terrain for gaps, toeholds, and opportunities. They also survey government and civil society, scouting not only for allies, as the social movements literature has long noted, but also for foes. And well they should: in most cases new policy will impinge on interests and challenge values. The possibility of resistance is real, and all that is necessary for rival players to take up arms is minimal information about a nascent menace. As we have seen in this chapter, religious conservatives mobilized early on, largely in parallel to gay mobilization.

What is the effect of opposition, whether latent or real? Most basically, it influences players’ initial decisions on three crucial matters: goals (conceived here as a problem/solution pair), members, and arenas. Of course, other factors both internal and external to the player enter into these decisions too, although I have not covered these here. Nor are such matters ever permanently settled. Strategic corrections are made continuously, based on interactions with other players and arenas. The “outcomes” of conflict are always provisional and temporary. However, these three points must typically be faced early, setting a tone for the future.

A first issue is whether players will seek narrow or broad goals, a matter which opposition directly affects. The more difficulty players anticipate, the narrower their construction of a problem and its solution – or the more camouflaged their portrayal of them. This does not mean that players will necessarily trim their problems and solutions in the face of opposition. But if players believe broad construction will endanger achievement of their substantive goals or maintenance of their organizations, they are likely to do so. As shown in this chapter, in the early years of activism at the UN, gay rights players, recognizing the power of opposition, portrayed their goals in narrow and veiled terms.

Reciprocally, opposition players face a decision about transforming latent into open resistance. Antagonists do not reflexively counter one another. Rather, the more threatening the problem/solution to potential opponents’ interests and values, the more likely that rival players will act, often by constructing a rival problem. Its identity? As we have seen in the UN conflict over gay rights, typically it is the very solution offered by the original player – and the player itself. For the Baptist-burqa network, gay rights and even the sexual orientation concept were seen as major threats, along with the gay rights network.
More generally, once conflict occurs, rival players will boost efforts to achieve their goals, each using the threat posed by the other as a basis for mobilizing its own. As a result, opposition will affect players’ size, membership, and identity. This occurs in at least two ways. First, anticipating hostility, players make proactive decisions about how and when to build their network. Certainly, the Baptist-burqa network strengthened itself with the aim of blocking and undermining its rival in the early 1990s. Although the network is clearly a compound player, it has worked cohesively against gay rights for decades, despite major cultural differences between its members. In turn, the gay rights network redoubled its efforts to expand its membership. Second, players may be forced to react as a result of rivals’ attacks aimed at unbuilding their network. ILGA’s ejection of NAMBLA, under pressure from the Baptist-burqa network, exemplifies this and shows how a foe’s attacks can reshape fundamental characteristics of a player.

Conflict will also affect players’ decisions about which arenas to enter. Most players operate in multiple arenas, but resource constraints force them to concentrate on a few primary ones. In explaining which are chosen, the social movements literature highlights “political opportunities,” emphasizing the relative openness or closure of domestic and international institutions. As an important aspect of this, opposition affects an arena’s openness and a player’s decision to enter. All else equal, players will work where their foes hold least sway – and avoid arenas they dominate. In the extreme, if a player finds its goals frustrated in one arena, it may move to another or establish a more friendly one. In the international conflict over gay rights, for instance, the rival networks created new sub-arenas to advance their causes and undermine their foes, with the Yogyakarta Principles and the Doha Declaration as key results.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, an opponent’s foray into a hostile arena may motivate a rival player to act there, too. If, for instance, the arena is strategically crucial in a larger battle, reluctant warriors may nonetheless enter, attempting to block action, warp policy, or at least show the flag. In the gay rights case, for instance, although the UN’s bureaucracy has been generally favorable to gay rights in recent years, members of the Baptist-burqa network could not ignore it. The UN is too important as an arena of international policy debate and formation. In any case, both networks have found ways of exploiting the UN’s norms, rules, and procedures, seeking to tilt those in their favor and against foes, with exclusion the ultimate prize.

Under fire, a targeted player has three options: ignore, rebut, or counterattack. The more threatening the attacks appear, the more likely that
the target will respond with rebuttal or counterattack. The result may be a vortex of venom reminiscent of a close election’s waning days. More generally, as McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly argue, contention further “polarizes” warring players, often strengthening opposed identities as well (2001).

How does opposition affect outcomes? The international gay rights conflict suggests two important but often overlooked points. First, the greater the opposition, the less effective a player will be in achieving its goals. Consider the Baptist-burqa network’s attacks on the legitimacy of UN processes. These have clearly undermined the gay network’s ability to achieve its goals. Second, conflict between players – rather than persuasion by one set of players – will shape outcomes. As one important aspect of this, analyses which highlight the role of framing in explaining policy decisions often ignore the fact that rival players fashion and promote potent, contradictory symbols of their own. Contention over whether gay rights are “equal” or “special” and whether religious principles are fixed or evolving illustrates these clashes. Similarly, players deploy conflicting “authorities,” in this chapter, for instance, on the legitimacy of the sexual orientation concept. Of course, the deployment of frames and expertise may excite the sympathetic, acting as flags to rally those who already have a generalized leaning to the position embodied in the frame or voiced by the authority. But it is unlikely that a new frame or a self-proclaimed expert will change the views of those with pre-existing antipathy to a position.

If by contrast, the analyst focuses on rival players working at odds with one another, it becomes clear that non-policy is a more likely outcome than policy. Even when opponents cannot extinguish policy making, they can often stall it. And even when delay ends, foes overtly or subtly shape the results. In some cases, their power is such that the policies produced are little more than “zombies,” so devoid of content that, while “alive” on paper, they are in reality dead. Sometimes these may be revived, but often they symbolize the fact that the arena in which a player has devoted substantial energy has turned out to be false: It may hold little prospect for achieving the player’s goals, despite expenditure of significant time and resources. In the international battle over gay rights, the UN is probably not a false arena. At minimum, it presents a prominent venue for promoting awareness of the issues in countries around the world. In some cases, this has doubtless incited more opposition, but in others it has likely bolstered support. Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether the UN is an arena in which gay rights players can hope to achieve their substantive goals, given the power of rival players.
References


