

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Stay off my field: policing boundaries in human rights and democracy promotion

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Abstract

The study of global politics is frequently organized around fields, but the boundaries of these fields are little understood. We explore the relationship between two proximate fields, human rights (HR) and democracy promotion (DP), in order to understand the emergence and maintenance of field boundaries. The two fields are closely linked in international law and practice, yet they have remained largely separate as fields of action, despite vast changes in global politics over four decades. The disjuncture has been largely maintained by HR organizations who police the boundary to keep DP out. We identify differences in anchoring norms as the key factor driving boundary maintenance. Actors in the two fields hold different foundational ideas about how to protect and advance rights, norms that we describe as cosmopolitan and statist. This account is superior to alternate explanations that emphasize functional demands or resource flows, and complements historical institutionalist accounts. Our research offers a theoretical contribution to the study of fields and practical insight into two important areas of global practice. Our qualitative research is supplemented by digital annotations, supported by the Qualitative Data Repository.

Key words: Democracy promotion; fields; global governance; human rights; NGOs; non-state actors

Human rights (HR) and democracy are closely related liberal ideals. Depending on one's definition, democracy can be understood as either nested within or synonymous with HR.¹ Democracy is explicitly called for in international HR law.² Democracies are more likely to respect HR than non-democracies.³

Yet the transnational fields of HR and democracy promotion (DP) can be disconnected and occasionally conflictual. Kathryn Sikkink notes how 'democracy-promotion advocacy is often separated from, and sometimes even counterposed

¹Donnelly 1999, 621; Schaffer 2015, 96; Landman 2018, 51.

²Rich 2001, 21–22.

³Sikkink 2017, 193.

to, human rights'.⁴ Other analysts also observe a separation between the two fields and view it as problematic. In 1994, Thomas Carothers argued 'differences' between HR and DP 'divert the scarce resources and energies of the two groups away from their essential tasks'.⁵ Michael Ignatieff later suggested transnational HR advocacy risks neglecting that constitutional democracies are the best guarantor of rights.⁶ For Jack Snyder, the 'somewhat coy, arm's-length treatment of democracy' by HR non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may hinder 'developing long-term strategies that fully integrate the necessarily linked goals of democracy and rights'.⁷

Why are the transnational fields of human rights and democracy promotion often separated and even counterposed, to use Sikkink's phrase? Such a separation is puzzling given that actors in both fields have expanded their ties with other fields, including development, humanitarianism, and peacebuilding.⁸

To understand the relationship between actors engaged in DP and HR, we examine the two fields' histories and the contemporary issue foci and self-conceptions of key actors within each field. Our analysis reveals considerable separation and occasional conflict between the HR and DP fields today, especially in the US and Western Europe and among NGOs. This separation is maintained through *boundary policing*. At key moments of potential change, actors in each field, and especially HR groups, have explicitly distanced themselves from the other.

We examine several possible explanations for boundary policing: functional necessity, resource availability, historical sequencing, and normative commitments. We find the last most compelling, though the historical institutionalist approach is complementary. Boundary policing occurred because actors in the two fields have different *anchoring norms*. They hold distinct ideas about how to promote political liberalism and relate to states. The HR field is *cosmopolitan* in its prioritization of individual rights violations, skepticism of the state, and preference for international law as the remedy. Until the 1980s, what would later come to be identified as DP actors largely overlapped with HR ones. Then, however, DP coalesced as a mostly separate field in North America and Western Europe and among NGOs, in part because of boundary policing by HR actors. DP was *statist* in its attention to the structural determinants of freedom and willingness to work with national authorities to alter state institutions and practices. When the relationship between HR and DP was later questioned, some HR actors defended the boundary, and occasionally DP actors did the same.

We reach these conclusions after reviewing a variety of forms of evidence, including contemporary and historical primary source material from state agencies, international organizations (IOs), philanthropies, and NGOs. We also draw upon 20 semi-structured interviews with key personnel that explored how actors in each field saw the other.⁹ We employ the Annotation for Transparent Inquiry

⁴Sikkink 2004, 158.

⁵Carothers 1994, 119.

⁶Ignatieff 2001, especially 299 and 310.

⁷Snyder 2017, 108–09.

⁸Paris 2004; Dorsey and Nelson 2008; Barnett 2018.

⁹We targeted individuals with experience at multiple organizations and, when possible, in both the HR and DP fields. Possible interviewees were identified through desk research and snowball sampling. Interviewees worked for at least 10 years in DP and/or HR. Most interviewees wished to remain unnamed

digital framework to bolster our evidentiary claims and make our analytic process more transparent.¹⁰

Our primary contribution is to describe and explain the relationship between the HR and DP fields, an issue of real-world importance at a moment of global democratic recession.¹¹ In addition, our attention to relationships among fields contributes to two areas of international relations (IR) theory. First, the study of field boundaries enhances our understanding of global governance. IR scholars increasingly use approaches like organizational ecology to study populations of organizations.¹² Yet defining an organizational population is not straightforward. Reviewing norms, international law, and some state practices, one could assume that actors working on HR and DP comprise a single population. Yet we show that such an approach would be mistaken, especially for Western NGOs. IR scholars can better define populations of global governance actors by looking closely at proximate fields and their boundaries. Such boundaries inform actors' identities, networks, and tactics,¹³ ultimately determining where a field starts and stops.

Second, our attention to field boundaries informs the IR literatures on practices and fields. Some scholars follow Bourdieu to study domination and stratification *within* fields. Our interest is in such dynamics *across* fields, which have received less attention.¹⁴ An exception is Michael Barnett's exploration of how humanitarianism and HR co-evolved.¹⁵ Building on that study, we use the concept of boundary policing to capture how and why actors within a field take steps to exclude new issues, ideas, or resources. Future research might use this concept to understand relationships among other proximate global fields, such as climate change and development or refugee response and migration.

We begin with a discussion of field boundaries as a concept and identify the role of norms in anchoring and distinguishing among fields. We then describe the contemporary boundary between DP and HR, which is the outcome we seek to explain. The next section traces the history of the HR and DP fields, focusing on how different anchoring norms encouraged the practice of boundary policing. We then consider three other explanations for boundary policing – functional necessity, resource dependence, and sequencing – before concluding.

so that they could speak freely regarding sensitive organizational matter. When referencing interviewees, we describe their current (or most recent) position in as much detail as we can in the footnotes, as well as providing additional details on their backgrounds when illuminating in the main text. Interviewees worked at NGOs in the USA, UK, France, and Argentina (Amnesty, Carter Center, Human Rights Watch, Physicians for Human Rights, Freedom House, Article 19, Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme, CELS, Global Rights, and Human Rights First), government agencies (US State Department), IOs (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), and foundations (Open Society, Human Rights Funders Network, Bertelsmann Stiftung, and Ford).

¹⁰Kapizewski and Karcher 2021.

¹¹Lührmann and Lindberg 2019.

¹²Abbott *et al.* 2016; Bush and Hadden 2019.

¹³Hadden 2014.

¹⁴Pouliot and Mérand 2012, 32–34; Bueger and Gadinger 2018, 42.

¹⁵Barnett 2018.

Fields and field boundaries

Our study considers the fields of DP and HR. In DiMaggio and Powell's classic formulation, fields 'constitute a recognized area of institutional life'.¹⁶ Many definitions emphasize that fields are defined by *internal* dynamics: for example, Fligstein and McAdam define fields as sites in which individuals or groups take action that is informed by shared understandings of purpose, legitimate action, and power relationships, while in Sending's definition, fields are relatively autonomous social spaces defined by actors' shared concept of an object of governance.¹⁷ As we highlight below, these shared internal conceptions – beliefs 'in the importance of what the field is about' – are influenced by external dynamics, particularly in proximate fields.¹⁸

Recent IR research focuses on fields as sites where individuals compete for status, yielding domination and stratification in endeavors like peacebuilding and diplomacy.¹⁹ Yet fields are not only sites of internal conflict. They are also settings in which actors share norms, learn, and engage in collective action.²⁰ Indeed, individual actors in a field 'will not see every move as a zero-sum game' but may be willing to act for the sake of the group to 'safeguard the sources of meaning and identity in their lives'.²¹ Boundary policing is one such action.

Boundaries account for which actors and practices are *not* part of an organizational field. They require construction and maintenance, a task undertaken by specific actors on behalf of the broader field. When fields are settled or distant, boundaries are taken for granted. When the political landscape changes, however, or when new resources or ideas emerge in proximate fields, actors may engage in boundary policing. *Boundary policing* as we define it is a strategy whereby actors consider and then intentionally exclude new issues, ideas, or resources. Policing is thus a form of 'boundary work',²² which also encompasses boundary expanding and defending. Boundary policing, as with other types of boundary work, is done by professionals who enact the norms of a field through arbitrating what counts as appropriate expertise.²³ This exclusionary effort distinguishes boundary policing from specialization or niche-building.

Boundary work has substantial impacts on real-world outcomes. Boundary spanning can mobilize resources and expand public support for the causes NGOs champion, but also challenge social movement identities.²⁴ By contrast, boundary policing prevents spillover, or 'the diffusion of ideas, activists, and tactics from one movement to another'.²⁵

¹⁶DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 148.

¹⁷Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Sending 2015.

¹⁸Sending 2015, 22.

¹⁹Sending 2015; Pouliot 2016.

²⁰Barman 2016; Krause 2018; Adler 2019.

²¹Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 218.

²²Gieryn 1983.

²³Seabrooke and Sending 2020.

²⁴Wang *et al.* 2018.

²⁵Hadden 2014, 7.

Anchoring norms and boundary policing

The puzzle that motivates our study is why actors in the DP and, especially, HR fields have policed a boundary between themselves in the US and Western Europe. The explanation we develop centers on the fields' *anchoring norms*. To be clear, this explanation does not deny that there are strategic reasons for actors in organizational fields to engage in boundary policing. For example, as we discuss below, HR organizations saw the framing of HR offered by DP organizations in the 1980s as both normatively undesirable and a material threat. Yet, as we show below, concerns about efficacy or resources alone cannot account for boundary policing in this case.

IR scholars traditionally define norms as 'a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity'.²⁶ Thus, norms involve an actor, an action, and 'a moral sense of "oughtness"'.²⁷ Norms are core parts of a fields' culture, understood as the 'bundles of ideas and matter that are linguistically, materially, and intersubjectively mediated in the form of practices'.²⁸ Any organizational field encompasses many norms, including about the appropriate training for professionals or the appropriate institutional form for actors. Norms also prescribe practices within a field, uniting activists and shaping their behavior. However, the norms we theorize as relevant for boundary policing are more fundamental. They are constitutive norms, or norms that 'create new actors, interests, or categories of action'.²⁹

The norms that lead to boundary policing are fields' 'anchoring concepts'. Drawing on Ann Swidler, Michael Barnett explains that anchoring norms articulate the 'essence' of a field; anchoring norms 'bind members of the group, alert them and others when they have wandered too far away from the fold, warn them when they have entered a liminal space, and help to define what constitutes a potential threat to the kind'.³⁰ A competing belief about appropriate action constitutes such a threat, not because (or not just because) it threatens a field's ability to achieve its goals or secure resources but because it threatens the field's constitution.

For the fields of HR and DP, we emphasize the different conceptualizations that some actors in the two fields ultimately arrived at about how to advance freedom. Actors engaged in both HR and DP share the goal of individuals freely exercising their rights. They have largely distinct beliefs, however, regarding the appropriate process by which that goal should be achieved. HR actors are more often committed to cosmopolitanism, whereas DP actors are more often committed to statism. Viewed from the outside, the statist–cosmopolitan divide may appear as the 'narcissism of small differences'. For practitioners, however, these differences get to the core of each field's work. They have remained surprisingly durable even as the global political landscape was transformed by the end of the Cold War and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Cosmopolitanism and statism are two competing philosophical starting points on global justice.³¹ Both hold that individuals are the ultimate units of moral

²⁶Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891.

²⁷Jurkovich 2020, 694.

²⁸Adler and Pouliot 2011, 13.

²⁹Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891.

³⁰Swidler 2001; Barnett 2018, 318.

³¹Tan 2018, 43.

concern.³² Cosmopolitanism (more precisely, political cosmopolitanism) specifies the international level as the legal, political, and institutional locus of political practice.³³ Cosmopolitanism thus sees no difference between domestic justice and global justice. By contrast, statism holds that the state (as a form of political association) has special moral status and is the site within which the equal rights of individuals should be protected.³⁴

On the specific question of how to advance freedom, cosmopolitanism and statism generate distinct anchoring norms. The cosmopolitan norm associated with HR implies that global rights defenders should focus on the investigation and defense of individuals to hold abusers to account according to international HR standards and often through international instruments. The statist norm associated with DP is that global democracy promoters should help countries transform state structures so that free individuals can participate in collective self-governance. As we describe below, these different conceptions of proper action were a direct outcome of interactions between actors in the nascent DP and HR fields. Those interactions distilled and solidified the two fields' largely different norms.

Cosmopolitanism and statism are associated with many distinct practices, as we illustrate in the next section. Those practices are guided by anchoring norms, each of which has an internal logic. To briefly preview that logic: most HR groups understand states as the problem, not the solution. For HR groups, states will always be imperfect as rights protectors, as even democracies violate HR. The cosmopolitan project of HR thus claimed to change global politics 'not through political vision but by transcending politics'.³⁵ HR advocates argue that freedom can be increased by focusing on individual abuses (e.g. torture, human trafficking, discrimination) and the exclusion of individuals from marginalized groups, prescribing the creation and implementation of international law as a remedy. This cosmopolitan orientation sidesteps the critique most clearly articulated by Arendt that rights depend on membership in a political community.³⁶ Rather than consider 'a politics of citizenship at home', the cosmopolitan orientation foregrounds 'a politics of suffering abroad',³⁷ even as this approach neglects the practical concern of who is responsible for the alleviation of that suffering.

By contrast, DP groups are more likely to be committed to a statist norm that prescribes how freedoms should be advanced. DP groups more often work to transform national institutions and processes, as is evident in their efforts to promote elections, rule of law, legislatures, and good governance. Democracy promoters argue that rights are better protected by democratic agents, however imperfect. This goal sometimes leads DP groups to work with governments to improve the quality and transparency of institutions (e.g. an election management body). At the same time, they also cooperate with, fund, and train domestic NGOs that coincide with the typical local partners of HR NGOs, such as dissident and women's groups.

³²Reilly 2009, 5 refers to this as moral cosmopolitanism.

³³Reilly 2009.

³⁴Benhabib 2011, 47–48; Tan 2018. See also Schaffer 2015.

³⁵Moyn 2012, 213. See also Hopgood 2009.

³⁶Arendt 1973.

³⁷Moyn 2012, 12.

Table 1. Main issues pursued by contemporary democracy promotion and human rights institutions

DP issues	Cross-cutting issues	HR issues
Civic education	Media	Anti-discrimination
Civil society	Civic and political participation participation/organizations	Anti-violence
Constitutions		Environmental rights
Elections		Health and well-being rights
Governance		Migration rights
Legislatures and parliaments		Sexual and reproductive rights
Local governance		Social/cultural rights
Political parties		Transitional justice
Rule of law		
Youth participation		

The puzzle: two different liberal fields

HR and DP share roots in liberal norms and practice. In this section, however, we establish that they have consolidated into two separate fields that only partially overlap in the US and Western Europe. Although NGOs such as Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) are central on the HR side, states play a larger role in DP. Moreover, the relevant NGOs are different and include groups such as Freedom House³⁸ and the Carter Center. At the same time, the major players within both fields broadly include some of the same IOs, including the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), and other regional IOs, as discussed below.

Analysts look to a variety of features to identify fields and their boundaries. We focus on two dimensions to delineate contemporary points of difference between the HR and DP fields: issue foci and actors' self-conceptions.

Issue foci

Actors in the HR and DP fields work mostly on different issues, which are associated with distinct practices and help produce the boundary between the two fields. Table 1 summarizes the main issues currently addressed in each field, based on the description of each field's activities offered by five global institutions active in one or both areas.³⁹ This table does not encompass every issue on which HR and DP actors *could* work (e.g. religious rights were not mentioned in these reports), nor does it capture the history of each field's evolution. The summary

³⁸Bush 2017.

³⁹We examined descriptions of each field from five global institutions: the Community of Democracies, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Human Rights Funders Network, the UN Democracy Fund, and the UNHRC. These institutions support the activities of NGOs from a range of countries and explicitly cover issues related to HR, DP, or both. We list the issues mentioned more than once across these five institutions as part of HR, DP, or both.

in Table 1 simply illustrates that leading global actors in DP and HR today describe themselves as working on different issues.

The HR field's practices focus on protecting various individual rights enshrined in international law, particularly for members of disadvantaged groups, whereas DP's practices focus more on structural changes at the national level, such as with its work on elections, governance, and rule of law. A practitioner with decades of experiences at National Democratic Institute (NDI), Freedom House, and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) suggested that current HR work reflects 'second generation' (economic and social) rights, whereas DP remains focused on civil and political rights.⁴⁰ This distinction reflects the two fields' differences in anchoring norms. Although DP actors seek to reform the state, HR actors have been pushed to address other HR enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as those related to discrimination and migration.

DP and HR share some issue areas: media, civic and political participation, and women's participation/organizations. These common issues suggest that some of the two fields' practices overlap. Yet even in these shared 'objects of governance',⁴¹ the approach is distinct. Consider women's participation/organizations. In DP, European donors take a service-delivery approach consistent with DP more generally: an 'indirect' strategy that supports training courses for women to access parliaments and local governments.⁴² In HR, by contrast, the preferred strategy for advancing women's rights privileges legal and international remedies.⁴³

Another illustration of the separation in issue focus can be found in the UNHRC's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Even though international HR treaties include provisions related to democracy, elections and civil society are peripheral concerns within this key institution.⁴⁴ Of the 57,686 recommendations made across the first two UPR cycles that covered 56 separate issues, only 1% concerned elections and 2% concerned civil society (issues central to the DP field). By contrast, 22% focused on international instruments, evidence of the cosmopolitan orientation of the HR field.

The issues that each field has tackled have evolved; neither field's practices are static. In the 1990s and 2000s, the HR field began to seriously consider the economic rights concerns of the development field, tackling famine, public health, and water rights.⁴⁵ Actors in the HR and humanitarianism fields, once disconnected, also began to explore collaboration.⁴⁶ In DP, many institutions embraced connections with peacekeeping and economic development.⁴⁷ Yet despite their shared liberal roots, there is only partial overlap in the issues that the contemporary DP and HR fields address. Reflecting on the relationship over time, one expert who has worked since the mid-1990s with multiple HR NGOs and foundations, including AI, HRW, and Physicians for Human Rights, said: '[s]o much else has changed,

⁴⁰Interview 15, former director, NDI, 8 February 2021.

⁴¹Sending 2015, 28.

⁴²Youngs 2008, 165–66; Bush 2015, 72–73.

⁴³Reilly 2009; Joachim 2010.

⁴⁴Available at <http://www.upr-info.org/> (last accessed 29 June 2022).

⁴⁵Dorsey and Nelson 2008.

⁴⁶Barnett 2018.

⁴⁷Girod *et al.* 2009; Barma 2017.

and very quickly, within the human rights field. And yet that dynamic, that relationship between democracy and human rights in the thinking and planning of human rights organizations – I don't think that has changed'.⁴⁸

Self-conceptions

Next, we consider how actors in each field describe themselves and their relationship with other fields. Mission statements and interviews offer evidence of self-conceptions that both produce and police proximate fields' boundaries.

Although some states and IOs espouse a commitment to both goals,⁴⁹ the disconnect is starkest among NGOs. First, we identified the 334 organizations (out of 2857 total) registered with the EU Transparency Register in February 2017 that mentioned HR or democracy as goals. Only one-fifth (69 NGOs) reported working on *both* HR and democracy. Second, we analyzed the missions of a random sample of HR NGOs from the 2017 *Yearbook of International Organizations*.⁵⁰ Only 10% referenced democracy or elections. Third, leading HR organizations such as Amnesty and HRW make no mention of democracy or elections in their mission statements, emphasizing instead international HR law.⁵¹ Given the well-known pattern that democracies are more likely to protect freedoms of association and expression, as well as other HR, this silence on democratic practices reflects the cosmopolitan orientation of these leading NGOs. We did find that DP organizations are more likely to invoke HR in their mission statements, as in the prominent cases of Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).⁵² Overall, however, our analysis of NGOs' mission statements reveals some points of overlap but mostly separation, with more examples of DP organizations embracing HR language than vice versa.

We also probed self-conceptions in the fields via interviews with key informants. HR practitioners noted a boundary between the HR and DP fields, albeit often taking it for granted. One HR practitioner with executive-level experience at several organizations said, 'They are pursued in kind of separate but intersecting tracks... I have always been on the human rights side and then there are other people that have been on the democracy side, and sometimes you can feel like "never the twain

⁴⁸Interview 3, HR consultant, most recently for Physicians for Human Rights, 25 February 2019.

⁴⁹See discussion of official donors in 'Resource dependence' section below.

⁵⁰Union of International Associations 2017.

⁵¹Amnesty does not mention democracy in its mission, but in describing core values, the Amnesty statute describes the group as a 'global community of human rights defenders with the principles of...democracy and mutual respect'. This statement makes the absence of democratic practices in the vision statement that much starker. Available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol20/1045/2019/en/> (last accessed 6 November 2022).

⁵²Freedom House's 'About Us' page states: 'Freedom House's programs support human rights and democracy advocates in their efforts to promote open government, defend human rights, strengthen civil society and facilitate the free flow of information and ideas'. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/about-us> (last accessed 20 May 2022). The NED's 'About Us' page states: 'NED is dedicated to fostering the growth of a wide range of democratic institutions abroad, including political parties, trade unions, free markets and business organizations, as well as the many elements of a vibrant civil society that ensure human rights, an independent media, and the rule of law'. Available at <https://www.ned.org/about/> (last accessed 20 May 2022).

shall meet.”⁵³ A staffer at an HR philanthropy said it never occurred to her to consider how DP could be included in HR.⁵⁴ As another HR interviewee who worked with multiple leading organizations in high-level roles put it, ‘democracy is very rarely mentioned out loud in the work of human rights organizations...The relationship is not debated’.⁵⁵ One informant claimed HR and DP were as different as ‘priests’ and ‘kings’: HR advocates ‘were always identifying what was wrong and what was right’, whereas DP groups ‘were about delivering [and] governing’.⁵⁶

In the DP field, our subjects also saw differences but felt more connected to HR principles. The Open Society Foundations (OSF) operate as both donor and advocate, and one leader there said, ‘We don’t see them [democracy promotion and human rights] as inconsistent or whatever, but I think you’re correct that the fields of play in the world are not as intersecting as one might think’.⁵⁷ Another with experience in both fields acknowledged that the idea that HR and DP groups do not get along is a ‘narrative going back twenty years’, but argued it was because actors in each field are too busy with their own concerns to collaborate: ‘there are just very big, practical, day-to-day differences that make their existence just apples and oranges’.⁵⁸

These claims reflect wider trends in the interactions among HR and DP NGOs. In 2017, there were 467 international NGOs classified as working in HR or DP in the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. They reported 681 ties to other NGOs. Only *three* of these ties were between HR and DP NGOs.

Three caveats

In sum, the HR and DP fields work on largely (but not exclusively) separate issues, and key actors describe their work as at most intersecting and often entirely separate. However, we offer three caveats to this characterization. First, our narrative risks overstating the homogeneity of practices within each field. Actors in HR and DP are not uniform, and the fields are not monolithic. Discussions of any ‘social kind’, including fields, risk essentializing members of a group.⁵⁹ In DP, for example, Holthaus contrasts German and US approaches.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in Germany, HR organizations see themselves as protest organizations, whereas DP organizations work with the government on capacity-building and training, suggesting the existence of differences.⁶¹ We follow other scholars (such as those cited in the Introduction) who characterize HR and DP as distinct in some important ways.

Second, ‘distinct’ does not mean ‘disconnected’. HR and DP still have points of intersection. In fact, the boundary policing we identify is most evident in North America and Western Europe. Many NGOs in illiberal countries have long seen

⁵³Interview 11, former executive, AI, 3 April 2019.

⁵⁴Interview 5, staffer, Human Rights Funders Network, 7 February 2019.

⁵⁵Interview 3.

⁵⁶Interview 9, executive, Ford Foundation, 17 May 2018.

⁵⁷Interview 12, executive, OSF, 17 September 2019.

⁵⁸Interview 1, executive, OSF, 22 March 2019.

⁵⁹Barnett 2018, 317.

⁶⁰Holthaus 2019.

⁶¹Interview 6, staffer, Bertelsmann Stiftungen, 8 May 2018.

themselves as working on *both* HR and DP. During the 1980s, for example, the Charter 77 movement in Czechoslovakia and the Solidarity movement in Poland collaborated with *both* Helsinki Watch (an HR NGO) and the NED (a DP foundation), despite tensions between NED and Helsinki Watch leaders back in the US.⁶² After the collapse of the Soviet Union, HR activists in Russia remained interested in collaborating with international supporters on activities such as election monitoring, even though election monitoring is a practice that is more associated with DP.⁶³ This local cooperation makes international boundary policing even more puzzling.

Finally, no field enjoys consensus on its content and boundaries. Field definition is a social process in which scholars and practitioners participate. Contests over the meaning of HR work or DP work are ongoing. However, the evidence suggests that, even if many members of each field aspire to dissolve the boundary between them, the daily practices of HR and DP are often distinct today.

The history of HR and DP: contested boundaries and norms

The histories of HR and DP are well-documented. Drawing up excellent prior scholarship and new evidence, we offer an account of the co-emergence of the two fields that highlights the role of the different norms that eventually anchored the fields.

The emergence of the human rights field (1940s–1970s)

By all accounts, the modern HR movement preceded the DP field. The precise start of the history of HR is the subject of much debate. Samuel Moyn focuses on the 1970s as the moment when ‘human rights’ as we know it today emerged, but others direct attention earlier to the 1960s, 1940s, or the Enlightenment.⁶⁴ We begin with the 1940s, when several key institutions relevant for HR and DP were created. We find that initially, the core attributes of the HR field encompassed a concern with democracy and elections, which would later characterize the DP field. Moreover, the HR field included institutions that would be important for DP. The relationship of HR to democracy was largely a non-issue.

After World War II, the horrors of the Holocaust vividly challenged the privilege of sovereign states to determine the fates of their citizens.⁶⁵ The UN Charter mentioned the phrase ‘human rights’ seven times, and HR and democracy alike were foundational to the UN Commission on Human Rights (1946), the Genocide Convention (1948), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948, UDHR). According to Moyn, the latter was initially understood as ‘a charter or template for national welfare states’, only later coming to provide a blueprint for transnational HR advocates and international lawyers.⁶⁶ After this flurry of activity, HR and democracy became largely dormant in IOs amidst Cold War

⁶²Laber 2005, 141–48.

⁶³Mendelson 2001, 88.

⁶⁴Moyn 2012; Pendas 2012; Hopgood 2013; Hoffmann 2016.

⁶⁵Cmiel 2004, 126.

⁶⁶Moyn 2018, 44.

tensions.⁶⁷ A state's treatment of its citizens was a point of contention between communists and capitalists, and the language of HR offered ammunition for both sides.

In the 1960s, two International Covenants – on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights – elaborated on the rights in the UDHR, creating standards that HR advocates could use to evaluate state performance. Democracy was nested within HR in these documents; for example, Article 25 of the ICCPR emphasized the rights of individuals to democratic processes, including free and fair elections. Also in the 1960s, Amnesty International was founded. Winner of the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize, Amnesty offered a model for other HR groups to follow.⁶⁸

In the 1970s, Western governments began to embrace HR in rhetoric and policy. Their focus was civil and political rights – practices that are core to liberal democracy. For example, in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, European states committed to protecting political rights and setup a schedule of conferences to monitor compliance.⁶⁹ The US Carter administration laid out the three types of HR it sought to protect, similarly defining them in such a way that included liberal democracy: personal integrity rights, basic human needs, and civil and political rights.⁷⁰

At the same time, HR activists emerging outside of the West also supported democratization, challenging apartheid in Africa, 'neo-liberal authoritarian regimes' in Latin America, and 'autocratic communist regimes' in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.⁷¹ Meanwhile, Western states drew upon models of representative democracy in their HR work, largely sidelining other rights concerns such as the rights of women and economic and social rights.⁷²

Finally, new Western NGOs connected local activists and powerful states. In France, the activism of 1968 and the ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in 1974 fed into a strong HR sector.⁷³ In the US, NGOs like Helsinki Watch grew quickly, and one count in 1978 identified a 'human rights lobby' of over 50 organizations that influenced Congress, the UN, and multinational firms.⁷⁴ The growing HR field spanned many countries: in 1978 the US ranked 7th in memberships in international HR NGOs, behind the UK, West Germany, France, Sweden, Netherlands, and Italy.⁷⁵

The arrival of democracy promotion (1980s–1990s)

The concept of 'democracy promotion' did not coalesce until the early 1990s,⁷⁶ but the nascent DP field began in the 1980s. Initially, DP actors and practices were part

⁶⁷Bosco 2009.

⁶⁸Hopgood 2009, 240.

⁶⁹Quataert 2011, 94–95.

⁷⁰Vance 1977, 223–24.

⁷¹Sikkink 2017, 40.

⁷²Reilly 2009, 26.

⁷³Madsen 2004.

⁷⁴Vogelgesang 1978, 825.

⁷⁵Tsutsui and Wotipka 2004, 94.

⁷⁶Based on a search of books published in English and digitized by Google Books, searchable at <https://books.google.com/ngrams> (last accessed 19 August 2019).

of the HR field. The separation of DP into its own field emerged from a debate over whether to advance HR through or above states, followed by HR groups' boundary policing to keep this new approach out. During this time, the HR and DP fields continued to have some common institutions and practices but increasingly sought to establish their distinctiveness.

The US Reagan administration's attempt to redefine HR was a key moment of contestation over the process for advancing HR. Reagan had first planned to dismantle the new Human Rights Bureau at the State Department.⁷⁷ Yet in late 1981, Elliott Abrams, the eventual Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, drafted a memo on 'Human Rights Policy' that was leaked to the *New York Times*.⁷⁸ Calling for a break with Carter's focus on individual rights violations, Abrams argued that addressing 'political rights and civil liberties' as foreign policy issues would give the US 'the best opportunity to convey what is ultimately at issue in our contest with the Soviet bloc'.⁷⁹ This statist conceptualization placed HR *within* interstate politics rather than above them. To support this work, Congress created the NED in 1983, a quasi-private grant-making foundation. New NGOs – including NDI and the International Republican Institute (IRI) – relied heavily on government support and helped implement its programming.⁸⁰

These organizations referenced HR in their missions.⁸¹ However, existing HR NGOs regarded them skeptically and began to construct a boundary to defend their cosmopolitan norms. In an internal memo from February 1986, Amnesty US board member Ann Blyberg argued that the Reagan administration's conceptualization of rights and democracy is not 'just a quarrel about semantics' but instead 'an attack on the entire post-World War II consensus about the nature and importance of human rights' and 'the very basis for AI's existence and its means of survival'.⁸² Indeed, HR activists were 'traumatized' by what they viewed as their cause's cooptation.⁸³ The resistance of HR supporters to using rights as justification for foreign policy reflected a foundational disagreement over whether states are effective mechanisms for advancing individual freedoms worldwide. This early divide over anchoring norms led to the emergence of distinct fields maintained by boundary policing in the coming years.

In the 1990s, the actors in and legal framework for DP both grew considerably. The end of the Cold War increased the demand for DP (as newly democratized states sought outside assistance) and the supply of it (as Western states and IOs grew more committed to the cause). UN peacekeeping increasingly embraced

⁷⁷Hartmann 2001, 425.

⁷⁸Barbara Crossette, 'Strong U.S. Human Rights Policy Urged in Memo Approved by Haig', *New York Times*, 5 November 1981, p. A10.

⁷⁹Abrams 2017, 40–41.

⁸⁰Bush 2016.

⁸¹For example, the NDI mission statement states: 'The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. Available at <https://www.ndi.org/mission> (last accessed 10 June 2020).

⁸²Ann Blyberg, 'AIUSA Program vis-à-vis the US Government, education on international human rights law', 23 February 1986. Amnesty International of the USA Inc. National Office Records, Box II.3 38, Folder 2. Rare Books and Manuscripts Archive, Columbia University Library.

⁸³Hartmann 2001, 403.

support for DP programs.⁸⁴ New organizations followed the NED model, including the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in the UK in 1992 and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy in 2000. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance was founded in 1995 in Stockholm to provide advice and research to support democratization. Older actors like the German political party foundations (*Stiftungen*) became affiliated with this growing DP effort.⁸⁵

The international legal architecture supporting DP also strengthened, though the referent was still HR.⁸⁶ The 1993 Vienna Declaration on Human Rights claimed that democracy was a universal human right that countries were obliged to protect. The UN Human Rights Committee adopted General Comment 25 in 1996, which specified state responsibilities regarding democratic freedoms and elections.⁸⁷ Thus, while the particular interests of a single powerful state were a critical driver of both the divergence and public debate between HR and DP, the end of the Cold War enabled DP to grow into a transnational field well beyond the projects advanced by the US government.

2000s until present: growing and established differences

In the 21st century, the HR and DP fields have been increasingly distinct and more internally coherent, revealing more settled practices grounded in cosmopolitanism (for HR) and statism (for DP). HR actors are more focused on individual violations and more likely to engage in advocacy, naming and shaming (including of democratic states), and litigation. In addition, HR actors' early focus on civil and political rights (a point of overlap with DP) has shifted in favor of a growing emphasis on social, cultural, and economic rights.⁸⁸ By contrast, DP organizations' core practices tend toward service delivery and are more likely to involve working with or through states.⁸⁹

Since the 2000s, the 'democracy establishment' has grown. The Secretary General's 2009 'Guidance Note on Democracy' committed the UN to democracy support.⁹⁰ The DP field also expanded to include NGOs from newly democratized states.⁹¹ The DP field's practices have been characterized by a 'service delivery' approach. They included trainings and other on-the-ground programs in non-democratic or transitioning countries, sometimes in collaboration with host governments.⁹² These practices situate DP as part of a larger international aid field, where DP has been evaluated as successful according to practically oriented programs around good governance and civil society that emphasized 'results over ideology'.⁹³ Criticisms of DP have grown, especially after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁹⁴

⁸⁴Paris 2004.

⁸⁵Pinto-Duschinsky 1991.

⁸⁶Mitchell 2016, 50–51.

⁸⁷As mentioned above, this shared legal foundation has not created a unified field, evident in the UNHRC's general neglect of elections as a rights issue.

⁸⁸Siméant and Taponier 2014.

⁸⁹Christensen 2017, 156–62.

⁹⁰Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/677649?ln=ar> (last accessed 20 December 2022).

⁹¹Petrova 2014, 17; Mendelson 2001.

⁹²Bush 2015, 4.

⁹³Christensen 2017, 150

⁹⁴Douzinis 2007; Benhabib 2011; Grimm and Leininger 2012.

Still, DP funding has continued to expand (discussed below), as has the number of actors in the global field.

Meanwhile, the HR field's orientation toward international law and individual rights violations strengthened, moving its core practices further from the service-delivery work of DP. A 1990s survey of global HR NGOs found that most had a primary goal of developing mechanisms for enforcing international standards and monitoring individual rights violations.⁹⁵ These efforts resulted in an explosion of international HR instruments.⁹⁶ As HR law developed, the UN's HR work moved from standard setting to implementation and enforcement.⁹⁷

Professionalization reproduced these relationships within and across fields.⁹⁸ The HR field's leaders are often elites with interests in the law. For example, recruitment for HR officers at the UN and other IOs has favored those with legal training.⁹⁹ By contrast, DP practitioners have more technical backgrounds, especially in domains such as elections.¹⁰⁰ Although HR personnel in both government and NGOs focus on the 'legalistic aspects of human rights', DP leaders come from development or politics and are 'culturally, politically, and intellectually remote from international law'.¹⁰¹ DP actors have their own degree programs, professional conferences, and new linkages with IOs and NGOs.¹⁰²

Occasionally, DP actors engage in advocacy in the Global North, a practice more associated with the HR field. Even in such cases, however, cosmopolitanism and statism yield different recommendations. During the Syrian Civil War, for example, leading HR NGOs such as AI, HRW, and the Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH) called for the International Criminal Court to investigate both the Syrian government and opposition forces for violations of international law. They also invoked international law in arguing for restrictions on weapons sales.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, leading DP NGO Freedom House called for greater US involvement and support to Syrian opposition groups, including via arms transfers.¹⁰⁴ The boundary is thus not a pedantic distinction; it can yield contradictory efforts.

A norm-based explanation of boundary policing

In sum, the relationship between the HR and DP fields went through three phases. Initially, the HR project focused on civil and political rights and thus was congruent with the project of expanding democracy. Second, starting in the 1980s, a distinct

⁹⁵Smith *et al.* 1998, 387.

⁹⁶Mchangama and Verdirame 2013.

⁹⁷Martens 2005; Mertus 2005; Charnovitz 2006.

⁹⁸Seabrooke 2014; Sending 2015.

⁹⁹O'Flaherty and Ulrich 2010.

¹⁰⁰Bush 2015, 48.

¹⁰¹Guilhot 2005, 505–07.

¹⁰²Bush 2015, 47–49.

¹⁰³Kristyan Benedict, 'Syria: Military Intervention – Six Key Points', AI, 28 August 2013; Kenneth Roth, 'The New Syria Will Need Human Rights, Not Reprisals', HRW, 4 February 2013; 'Syria: The International Community Must Act Now. Horror Must Be Investigated', FIDH, 22 August 2013.

¹⁰⁴Charles Dunne, 'The Syrian Crisis: A Case for Greater U.S. Involvement', Freedom House, 14 March 2013; Charles Dunne, 'Time Running Out to Aid Syria's Rebels', CNN.com, 3 July 2013.

DP field emerged in North America and Western Europe, with a vision of how to work with states that HR actors opposed. Boundary policing by HR groups in reaction to this statist vision led to a more unified and mostly separate HR field anchored in cosmopolitanism. Finally, by the 2000s, these differences between the fields began to be taken for granted.

Boundary policing was driven by different conceptions of the proper relationship with states in the process of advancing freedoms. In the 1980s, the first HR effort at boundary policing occurred in reaction to the Reagan administration's statist interpretation of rights protection, challenging the HR field's self-conception.¹⁰⁵ It crystallized some HR actors' vision of their work as politically cosmopolitan, prompting them to engage in boundary policing to prevent this new approach from taking hold. Boundary policing was more prevalent in North America and Western Europe than in the countries often targeted by HR and DP NGOs, but the power Western actors possess made this policing resonate globally.

Boundary policing led to greater coherence within the HR field. The 'loosely structured human rights community' in the West began to coordinate activities and vocally criticized the US government.¹⁰⁶ The stabilizing HR field was not hostile to democracy but wanted to be free to critique all regime types, and activists were frustrated by the seeming instrumentalization of liberal principles to serve geopolitical interests. They accused the Reagan administration of ignoring allies' abuses and using HR as a shield for controversial policies (such as funding the Contras in Nicaragua). They explicitly and publicly differentiated their work from that of the US government.¹⁰⁷ '[L]engthy, vituperative letters' between the State Department's Elliott Abrams and Aryeh Neier, who was working with Americas Watch (an HRW predecessor), were said to have 'filled the better part of a filing cabinet'.¹⁰⁸

Boundary policing by HR groups continued through the 1990s. Testifying before Congress in 1994, HRW's Holly Burkhalter bemoaned the seeming distortion of HR principles, stating that that 'the reason why the word "democracy" gives... me the hives, is because it has been so exploited in years past'.¹⁰⁹ When the US government changed the name of the State Department's Bureau of 'Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs' to the Bureau of 'Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor' in 1998, Amnesty 'warned against treating democratization and human rights policy as interchangeable policy labels'.¹¹⁰ On the other side of the field boundary, some DP advocates decried HR organizations' hostility. Years later, Elliott Abrams wrote that it is 'absurd and unrealistic' to pursue HR as

¹⁰⁵Søndergaard 2019, 40.

¹⁰⁶Jacoby 1986, 1070.

¹⁰⁷Sikkink 2004, 157.

¹⁰⁸Laber 2005, 168.

¹⁰⁹'Oversight of the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1993 and U.S. Human Rights Policy', Hearings, 1 February and 10 May 1994, United States Congress House Subcommittee on International Security, International Organizations, and Human Rights of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 103rd Congress, 2nd Session. Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1994.

¹¹⁰Hartmann 2001, 403.

many HR NGOs like AI do without more regard for the overarching political context.¹¹¹

While HR groups appear to most frequently engage in boundary policing, DP organizations also used such policing practices to defend their normative statism. A 1983 letter from Freedom House executive director Leonard Sussman illustrates the organization's special attention to states:

We are quite different from Amnesty International.

Freedom House believes that the structure of governments determines their treatment of their own citizens and their foreign policies. Consequently, we strive to increase the level of political rights and civil liberties within countries. Amnesty does not try to affect structural change, but deals mainly with the inhumane treatment of citizens and others. We take such factors into account, of course, but place major emphasis on long-term structural change.¹¹²

Freedom House presented reform of state institutions as *the* path to rights protection, implying that a focus on individuals was narrow and short term.

More recently, DP actors have again pushed back against bridging work at the boundary. From 2015 to 2017, the UN's Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights and the Carter Center, a leader in election monitoring, convened a series of workshops to advance strategies of collaboration between HR experts and electoral practitioners.¹¹³ The latter were less open than the former, according to one staffer, who noted the literal ocean between the UN's HR and political processes teams and suggested that 'at some level, there is a philosophical disagreement over whether an election is a human rights exercise or a political exercise'.¹¹⁴ The DP community remains committed to enhancing collective participation within the political association of the state and skeptical of cosmopolitan commitments, and that commitment can lead DP actors to also police the boundary between DP and HR.

Alternative and complementary explanations

The emergence of two largely separate fields of HR and DP is an interesting puzzle to be explained for IR theory. To evaluate the soundness of our norm-based explanation, we consider three potential alternative explanations for boundary policing: functional necessity, resource dependence, and historical sequencing.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹Abrams 2017, 55–56.

¹¹²Leonard Sussman, 'Letter to Lawrence Dunn, November 3, 1983', Freedom House Records, Box 39, Folder 2, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Used by Permission of the Princeton University Library.

¹¹³The Carter Center and OHCHR, *Concept Note, Human Rights and Election Standards Conference*, 18 October 2017. Available at <https://electionstandards.cartercenter.org/at-work/hres/hresdecember2017/> (last accessed 20 December 2022).

¹¹⁴Interview 16, staffer, Carter Center, 23 February 2021.

¹¹⁵In addition, the communities of practice and field theory literatures highlight how contestation among experts shapes the authority of practices and background knowledge, which can enhance or degrade social

Functionalist and resource-dependency arguments cannot account for boundary policing in the face of shared goals or expanding resources. Historical institutionalism (HI) is complementary to our normative explanation. It laudably emphasizes the role of early choices but requires additional factors to explain stasis or change.

Functional necessity

Functionalism assumes that organizational strategies ‘advance a particular goal or meet a particular organizational need’.¹¹⁶ Functionalists might expect fields to be disconnected if their goals differ or conflict. Yet the HR and DP fields have some goals that are identical and others that are complementary. As one HR practitioner described, HR and democracy are ‘more or less the same at their core. They’re both fundamentally about participation, non-discrimination, and basic respect for the person’.¹¹⁷ While democracy and HR are complex concepts that are measured in various ways, there is a strong correlation between them using a variety of measures, country cases, and time periods.¹¹⁸ Ex ante, then, functionalism implies that HR advocates will support the spread of democracy and build bridges with DP actors. Instead, they run programs separately and remind their audiences that democracies also violate rights.

Functionalists might then argue that the processes necessary to achieve the same goal are different.¹¹⁹ One could argue that HR are more grounded in international law than democracy, which might demand closer work with IOs.¹²⁰ Yet democracy is explicitly called for in international HR law, including the UDHR and the ECHR.¹²¹ The UDHR’s drafters saw democratic participation as genuine HR, and World War II ‘reinforced their belief that the cluster of rights spelled out in Articles 18, 19, 20, and 21 are universally the first ones dictators will seek to deny and destroy’.¹²²

Another possibility is that the two fields must take different approaches to working in illiberal states out of functional necessity, with one field requiring cooperation with states to engage in service delivery while the other must remain independent to monitor and criticize states. If compliance with international law depends on voluntary changes in the behavior of states, HR activists might need to remain independent to credibly ‘name and shame’ violators.

This explanation is also problematic. Practitioners disagree about whether illiberal governments resist HR or DP more. Some HR practitioners claim their

orders (Adler 2019, 185–90). Competition for epistemic autonomy can yield ‘fractal distinctions’ (Abbott 2001), or boundaries that emerge and repeat within a field or discipline (e.g. Seabrooke and Tsingou 2014). Our research on the HR–DP boundary does not suggest a patterned subdivision of work to advance political liberalism, but rather a foundational split over where and how to do the work. These are not splits within a profession (as in methodological choice in an academic discipline) but differences of professions (as in between economics and sociology).

¹¹⁶Ohanyan 2012, 375.

¹¹⁷Interview 5.

¹¹⁸Landman 2018.

¹¹⁹Barnett 2018, 316.

¹²⁰Donnelly 1999, 612–13; Landman 2018, 50.

¹²¹Roosevelt 1948; Duranti 2017.

¹²²Morsink 1999, 69.

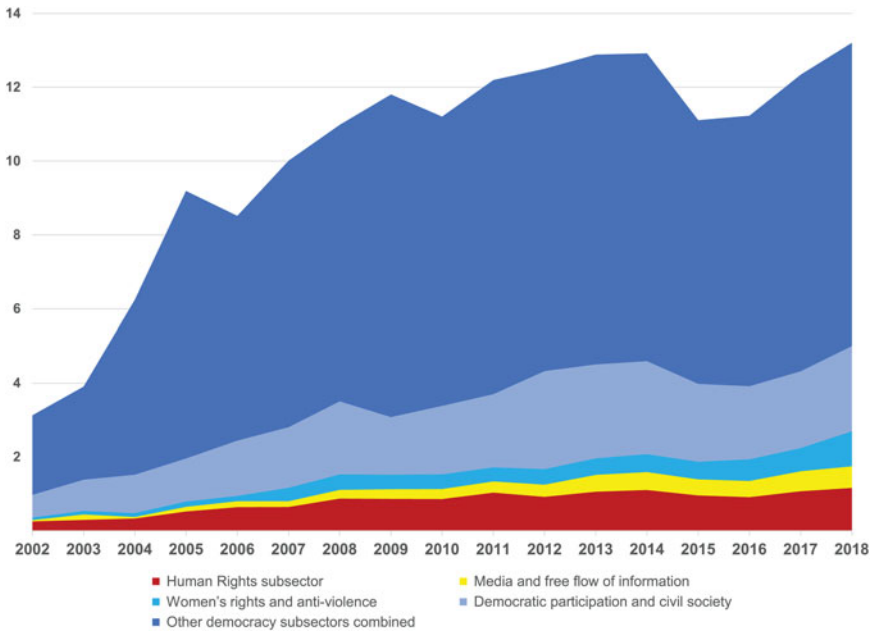


Figure 1. Official Aid for Human Rights and Democracy, 2002–2018 (\$USb current)

Source: OECD (2020), *Query Wizard for International Development Statistics*. Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. <https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/> (accessed 12 May 2020).

neutrality can enhance their access to states, as governments see groups like AI as impartial arbiters of competing interests.¹²³ In this view, collaboration with states is essential for insider advocacy to shape HR protection. Others argue that DP practitioners ‘come in already with huge amounts of access compared with human rights organizations... And yet they ... tend to water things down in order to collaborate with governments’.¹²⁴ Perhaps most importantly, if this argument is correct, we should see states that are targeted by transnational pressure on HR and DP making distinctions between the two fields. They do not, viewing differentiation between the fields to be ‘formalistic at best’ in the 1990s.¹²⁵ Recent restrictions on NGOs around the world have targeted *both* external HR and DP organizations.¹²⁶

This HR–DP overlap *in the field* makes differences and boundary policing in North America and Western Europe more puzzling, as they impede deeper collaboration. Consider the frustration of a leader at the OSF:

Subject: In most places where we are working, democracy and human rights are not at odds. We are calling for more democracy, more effective enforcement, and protection of human rights. We don’t see them as in tension.

¹²³Leebaw 2007; Hopgood 2009.

¹²⁴Interview 3.

¹²⁵Carothers 1994, 112.

¹²⁶Christensen and Weinstein 2013, 78; Cooley and Schaaf 2017, 160.

Interviewer: I think for us that's part of the puzzle. From talking to activists in the field, they don't necessarily see a meaningful distinction...

Subject: Yeah. Because people in the field have to deal with reality. And the reality is these problems are across the spectrum, and they can't be encompassed in either term by themselves. That's the reality. We know that.¹²⁷

In this telling, functional concerns about how to best enhance participation and protect rights are *impeded*, not improved, by separation between the two fields. Similar issues came up in other interviews we conducted. For one long time HR activist, for example, Viktor Orbán's transformation from student recipient of HR funding in the 1980s and 1990s to opponent of liberalism questioned the wisdom of avoiding democracy in HR work.¹²⁸

Resource dependence

A second driver of boundary policing might be donor preferences, as funding is vital to organizational survival.¹²⁹ In particular, boundary policing might be more likely when actors compete to access common funding. Since boundary policing is primarily coming from HR, resource-dependency theory implies that the boundary is in HR organizations' best financial interest.

In fact, DP is at least not a threat to HR and at most an opportunity to access new resources. First, HR and DP depend on different funding sources. HR organizations rely heavily on private donors, especially foundations.¹³⁰ In 2016, foundation giving to HR totaled \$2.8 billion.¹³¹ Large HR NGOs such as Amnesty and HRW have also been able to cultivate support from private citizens.

Second, official aid for DP has expanded substantially. DP depends heavily on government donors. Foreign aid for democracy was under \$1 billion in the late 1980s but more than \$10 billion in 2015.¹³² Meanwhile, official aid related to HR has grown much more slowly, as [Figure 1](#) illustrates.¹³³

If resource mobilization is key to organizational success, we would expect HR organizations to embrace DP to access these funds. Although issues like the media, civic and political participation, and women's participation/organizations are shared by actors in both fields, resource dependency would predict more work by HR groups on DP issues like constitutions, elections, and legislatures and parliaments to access more government aid. We do not observe such a shift. In fact, although Richard Claude described a 'thick and furious' debate among HR NGOs after the end of the Cold War over whether to accept government money, 'most stayed away'.¹³⁴

¹²⁷Interview 12.

¹²⁸Interview 2, former executive, HRW, 20 March 2019.

¹²⁹Cooley and Ron 2002.

¹³⁰Smith *et al.* 1998; Welch 2001.

¹³¹Candid and Human Rights Funder's Network, *Advancing Human Rights* (2019), available at <https://humanrightsfunding.org/reports/> (last accessed 20 December 2022).

¹³²Carothers 2015, 60.

¹³³The data come from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

¹³⁴Interview 20, former executive, Physicians for Human Rights, 20 July 2006.

Moreover, the HR field in the West has policed the boundary with DP *despite* the preferences of several powerful global donors that would prefer a closer relationship, including EU agencies, the OSF, and the NED. The US government supports ‘rule of law/human rights’ as part of democracy aid and it structures its aid agencies, including the ‘Human Rights and Democracy’ fund and the ‘Center for Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance’, such that the issue areas overlap.¹³⁵

Nevertheless, the fields remain largely separate. The experience of European donor agencies is instructive. Since the late 1980s, the EU has taken up HR and democracy as a basket of shared concerns in its external relations and aid, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) established in 1994, has provided roughly €100 million a year.¹³⁶ Yet the EIDHR has recently abandoned its efforts to treat the two fields as one. A 2017 external evaluation described how the ‘interwoven’ pursuit of democracy and HR from 2007 to 2013 created ‘grey zones’ and other problems, so the two objectives were separated in 2014.¹³⁷

Finally, HR groups’ boundary policing could follow the preferences of private individual donors, a key funding source for HR organizations. There are four problems with this explanation. First, although AI and HRW have many individual supporters, other HR NGOs have struggled to gain public attention and rely on large foundations for revenue.¹³⁸ Foundation preferences should thus matter more for most HR NGOs. Second, large numbers of small donors face a collective action problem in coordinating to express their preferences and drive HR NGOs’ strategies. Third, most individuals perceive convergence between HR and democracy.¹³⁹ Finally, DP funds are larger and easier to access than individual donations.

Sequencing

HI understands fields as defined by the dynamics that emerge during critical junctures and that become institutionalized over time. While new fields might emerge in moments of disruption, HI sees most change as incremental within existing institutions.¹⁴⁰ Institutions reinforce the power of the privileged groups that created them,¹⁴¹ so resistance to new fields should emerge when powerful actors feel threatened. Here, boundary policing could reflect a disconnect among the prior institutional arrangements onto which they were grafted.

The HI account has many strengths, as sequencing helps account for the consolidation of different positions. While the growing HR field was consolidating around a cosmopolitan ethos focused on promoting individual rights through international law, the Reagan administration tried to redefine HR as subservient

¹³⁵Congressional Research Service 2019, 6, 9.

¹³⁶Youngs 2008, 14; Börzel and Risse 2009.

¹³⁷External Evaluation of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (2014–mid 2017), Final Report, Volume 1, June 2017, p. 17.

¹³⁸Stroup 2012.

¹³⁹Ron *et al.* 2017, 46–50.

¹⁴⁰Capoccia and Kelemen 2007.

¹⁴¹Fioretos 2011, 388.

to democracy and part of states' foreign policies. The resulting disconnect was later institutionalized. This pattern is consistent with path dependence, as newly powerful actors (HR organizations) defended the norms that anchored their field (and their positions at its center) by excluding new DP organizations.

One key challenge for this explanation is explaining continuity in the face of general upheaval. The end of the Cold War was a prime moment for redefining the relationship between HR and DP with the third wave of democratization, the expansion of IOs, and interest in the responsibility to protect individual rights. It was a critical juncture in the promotion of political liberalism around the globe. While HI generally invokes the concept to explain rare moments of change, historical institutionalists note that in a situation 'in which several options are possible, the outcome may involve the restoration of the pre-critical juncture status quo'.¹⁴² To explain the continuity in the HR field, we thus need to go back and look at the alternative choices that were available.

The expanded political opportunities and resources of DP could have been understood as an attractive and welcome opportunity to better integrate DP and HR. DP became a 'world value' after the Cold War.¹⁴³ The growing DP field had also shifted toward promoting the rule of law, which offered another opportunity for a deeper connection to the HR field.¹⁴⁴ Practitioners working on the rule of law view local capacity building, access to justice, and institutional reform as necessary to realize both democracy and HR, themes closely tied to grassroots HR activism.¹⁴⁵

Yet at this moment of uncertainty and with alternatives available, HR groups engaged in explicit boundary policing. In a widely published 1993 speech, Amnesty leader Ian Martin noted the 'beguiling prospect' of powerful governments seemingly ready to center their foreign policies around HR, but argued that 'this is a prospect which the human rights movement should view coolly... It should not identify itself with the new Western rhetoric of "democracy, human rights and the free market economy."¹⁴⁶

The cosmopolitanism that focused on individual rights was kept separate, even as DP became a bipartisan cause in the US and was incorporated into global governance institutions. While HI ably captures stasis in the HR field, understanding the driver of this continuity requires attention to the cosmopolitan norms in the HR community that demand distance from state actors in the process of advancing rights.

Implications

The case of boundary policing between the fields of HR and DP has at least two significant theoretical implications. First, our emphasis on anchoring norms is a

¹⁴²Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 352.

¹⁴³McFaul 2004.

¹⁴⁴Schimmelfennig 2012, 111–12.

¹⁴⁵Interview 12.

¹⁴⁶Ian Martin, *The New World Order: Opportunity or Threat for Human Rights?* Edward Smith Visiting Lecture, Harvard Law School Human Rights Program, 1993; Gay MacDougall Papers, 1967–1999, Series III: Writings and Later Works, Box 250, Folder 5. Rare Books and Manuscripts Archive, Columbia University Library.

potential bridge among various approaches in IR, including constructivism and practice theory. While these approaches have evolved as separate schools,¹⁴⁷ some scholars have tried to revisit and connect them,¹⁴⁸ in part to avoid the 'isms' debates and focus on the actual stuff of global politics.¹⁴⁹

Our case study follows this pragmatic impulse, as the development of any field's boundaries is discovered through empirical analysis and should draw on a wide range of schools. We find that cosmopolitanism and statism are prescriptive norms about how actors ought to relate to states. These claims about how practitioners should operate are part of the meso-level processes by which actors organize into discrete areas of action. As our account reveals, these norms anchor the two fields. Engagement across the two proximate fields has led each to crystallize their core commitments in ways that distinguish one from the other, though not entirely. These core commitments show up in the issues they tackle and the ways they describe themselves, not to mention the networks they build.

Our account thus illustrates how norms inform practices. Norms do not stand alone as independent objects explicitly articulated by those that hold them; they are made visible in routines and structures.¹⁵⁰ Yet practices are not just habits or routinized behaviors; they are social interactions that produce and reflect 'common knowledge' in a given community.¹⁵¹ Our empirical focus has revealed the role of anchoring norms in structuring practices within fields. Cosmopolitan and statist norms are common knowledge in the HR and DP fields, so much so that some of our informants reported little debate or consideration of the relationship between HR and democracy. These norms are collectively held ideas about who should do what and codified in the behavioral templates of organizations and fields.¹⁵²

A focus on anchoring norms directs attention to new facets of relationships among global governance fields. For example, both foreign aid donors and private investors provide financial resources for developing countries and share a goal of supporting economic growth in the Global South.¹⁵³ Their foundational norms may differ, however, with the foreign aid field grounded in norms of obligations among states of different levels of wealth, while the field of private finance celebrates market mechanisms to resolve social problems.

Our second theoretical contribution is to identify how competition among fields can yield the strategy of boundary policing. In the study of fields and populations, much attention is given to competition and how it leads to dysfunction.¹⁵⁴ Although recent research has focused on competition within fields, we shift the focus to relations between fields. The stakes of competition can look more or less severe depending on the value of the boundary. For DP actors, the exclusionary claims of HR actors have drawn ire, but boundary policing did not pose an

¹⁴⁷McCourt 2016.

¹⁴⁸Barnett 2018; Pratt 2020.

¹⁴⁹Pouliot and Mérand 2012, 25; McCourt 2016, 432.

¹⁵⁰Swidler 2001.

¹⁵¹Adler and Pouliot 2011, 19.

¹⁵²Kentikelenis and Seabrooke 2017.

¹⁵³Available at <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2021/06/30/the-growing-role-of-the-private-sector-in-development-co-operation-challenges-for-global-governance/> (last accessed 6 July 2022).

¹⁵⁴Cooley and Ron 2002.

existential threat, as the field began with support from a powerful state and later enjoyed growing international demand. The importance of the boundary is greater for HR groups, who built their field with a smaller resource base and independence from states – but then faced a direct challenge to their foundational norms. Unable to prevent DP actors from using the language of rights, HR actors were the primary employers of boundary policing strategies, though some DP actors have worked to maintain the boundary as well.

We also weigh in on various explanations for boundary policing. Across the many issues that make up global politics, boundaries are dynamic. The security field now includes human security; development professionals have expanded into climate change mitigation; environmentalists increasingly pay attention to gender. The story of HR and DP focuses our attention on where fields *stop*. Perhaps counterintuitively, field boundaries may have little to do with functional demands or donor preferences. Building and maintaining boundaries can emerge in response to differences over foundational norms. Moreover, we found that democracy and HR are intimately connected in international law, but the actual work of each field requires many more layers of meaning and expert knowledge. NGOs can serve as powerful arbiters of a field's content, sometimes against the preferences of donors, states, and IOs.

Beyond our study's theoretical implications, we note that exclusion through boundary policing has real-world impacts, shaping the strategies and influence of actors in DP and HR. Two fields that share a commitment to political liberalism remain divided on how to pursue this goal. The disjuncture shapes the content and size of the political coalitions advocating for HR and DP and the strategies they use. Consider how HR groups responded to the Trump Administration's announcement of a Commission on Unalienable Rights. Hundreds of HR groups signed a letter that defended international law, critiqued the US government and autocratic regimes, and challenged the natural law approach of the Commission's charge.¹⁵⁵ Conspicuously absent from the signatories were core organizations from the DP community, including Freedom House, IRI, and NDI. Well-policed field boundaries define the range of possible coalitions that emerge in response to new issues.

One common criticism of the HR field is that it devotes insufficient attention to the economic and social considerations that are necessary for real equality.¹⁵⁶ Although they do not use the language of boundary policing, these critics argue the HR movement has policed its boundary *on the left* to exclude certain economic and social rights. Our research shows the field is even narrower. HR has also policed its boundary *on the right* to exclude work on elections and other issues that might otherwise be compatible with its commitments. As pundits debate global challenges to liberalism, the story of HR and DP reveals that there have been long-standing tensions among liberal actors. These tensions may ultimately benefit the opponents of individual autonomy and collective self-governance.

¹⁵⁵Letter to Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, available at <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/coalition-letter-to-secretary-of-state-mike-pompeo-on-the-commission-on-unalienable-rights/> (last accessed 20 December 2022).

¹⁵⁶Chandhoke 2007; Benhabib 2011; Moyn 2012.

Data availability. This paper uses Annotation for Transparent Inquiry (ATI), an approach to openness in qualitative scholarship. Access to the annotations, as an overlay to the digital article, can be found by viewing the full-text HTML of this article online. Access to a stand-alone copy of the annotations and underlying data is available here: <https://doi.org/10.5064/F6G3T1PF>

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