

Patterns of Global Democracy Promotion: Centrality in DINGO Networks, 1981–2015

Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World
 Volume 9: 1–4
 © The Author(s) 2023
 Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
 DOI: 10.1177/23780231231221462
srd.sagepub.com



Jessica Kim¹  and Andrew Collins²

Abstract

Despite the long-recognized role of international organizational networks in spreading global norms, including democracy, democracy-promoting international nongovernmental organizations (DINGOs) remain understudied. This visualization addresses this gap by plotting nations' degree centrality within various DINGO networks over time from 1981 to 2015, thereby quantifying, for the first time, the configuration of nonstate democracy promotion networks. The results indicate that all networks are extremely dense, and nations' mean centrality increases over time. Although dispersion tends to decrease over time, particularly after 2000, relatively high dispersion persists for one network: civil liberties. Thus, although more nations are increasingly integrated within DINGO networks overall, this trend is not uniform. The authors suspect that this difference reflects nations' growing disillusionment with an enterprise that condemns civil liberties only when geopolitics allow and the subsequently declining traction of civil liberties norms. The results suggest a pivotal yet potentially controversial role of DINGO networks and motivate further research exploring their effects.

Keywords

DINGOs, democracy, democracy promotion, networks, social network analysis, SNA, international organizations, INGOs, norm diffusion

How does democracy proliferate? Many point to the importance of international organizations in disseminating global norms, such as democracy, to national contexts (Meyer et al. 1997). As nations become more plugged into organizational networks, the number of pathways through which norms travel expands, accelerating diffusion (Paxton, Hughes, and Reith 2015). Given this, it is surprising that we do not know more about how democracy-promoting international nongovernmental organizations (DINGOs)¹ contribute to the spread of democracy. Our visualization fills this gap by exploring the architecture underlying DINGO networks using social network analysis, thus providing novel insights about (1) DINGOs and their relations with states and (2) their structural capacity to foster democratization, while (3) providing a more complete picture of the democracy promotion enterprise.

¹Any international nongovernmental organization that significantly promotes democracy or its components.

Drawing upon an original DINGO dataset, Figure 1 uses violin and dot plots to visualize the distribution in nations' degree centrality between 1981 and 2015 across four DINGO network categories. We present (1) the overall DINGO network ("All") and three DINGO subnetworks promoting different components of democracy² on the basis of conventional definitions (2) civil liberties, (3) rule of law, and (4) democracy, general (Møller and Skaaning 2012). A trend line (red) plots the mean normalized degree for each category across each year of observation.

²Because electoral DINGOs are so scarce, they are included in "all categories" but are not evaluated separately.

¹WZB Berlin, Berlin, Germany

²Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY, USA

Corresponding Author:

Jessica Kim, WZB Berlin, Reichpietschufer 50, 10785 Berlin, Germany
 Email: jessica.kim@wzb.eu



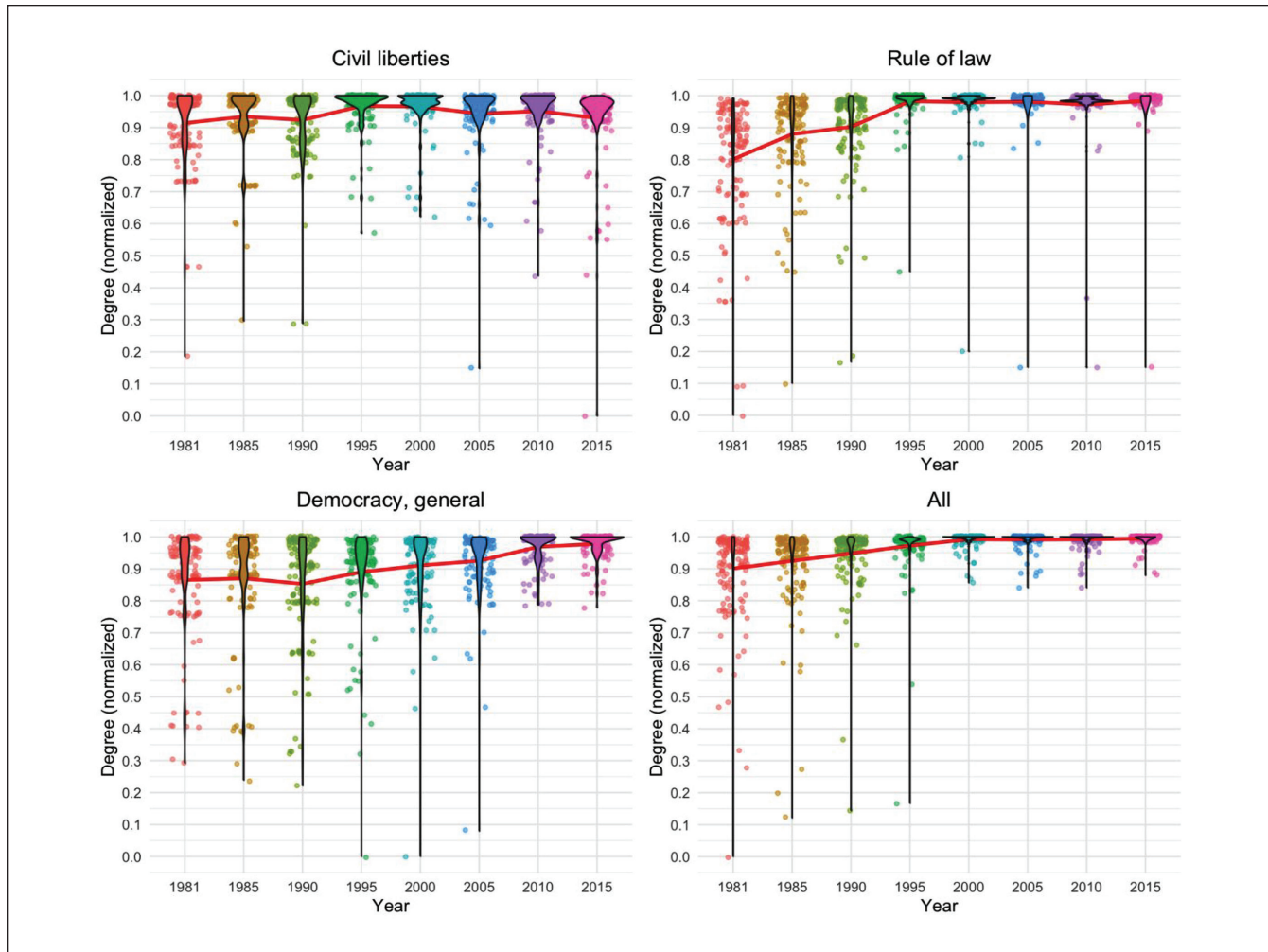


Figure 1. Degree distribution within DINGO networks, 1981 to 2015.

Note: Data are from the democracy-promoting international nongovernmental organizations (DINGO) dataset, which captures countries' DINGO linkages in five-year increments between 1981 and 2015. The figure depicts four DINGO networks generated from these data, categorized on the basis of their stated aims and activities: civil liberties (top left); rule of law (top right); democracy, general (bottom left); and all categories (bottom right). Within each network, countries are the nodes, and shared DINGO memberships are the edges. Each nation's degree centrality, or the total number of edges it possesses (i.e., the total number of shared DINGO memberships), is normalized on a scale of 0 to 1 then plotted along the y-axis. Each estimate is disaggregated by year, which is plotted on the x-axis. Years are denoted by color. Overlaid violin plots convey the shape of the sample distribution by year. The red trend line plots nations' mean normalized degree centrality, which depicts the overall level of integration within each network. In our case, because the networks are undirected (i.e., norms flow in both directions) and because we normalize degree, this measure is equivalent to graph density. To ensure valid comparisons within networks over time, each network maintains a constant sample size (i.e., nations present across all time points). Sample sizes for the graphs are as follows: all categories, $n = 154$; civil liberties, $n = 138$; rule of law, $n = 131$; and democracy, general, $n = 124$. Dense clustering around high density values, regardless of year or network category, suggests that all DINGO networks are highly interconnected and should therefore facilitate democratic norm diffusion with ease. Yet this high integration may also reinforce the dissemination of highly standardized, often superficial models of democracy. Considering trends in dispersion, the civil liberties network exhibits relatively greater and sustained variability over time compared with the remaining three. This difference is especially pronounced after the early to mid-2000s, suggesting that nations are becoming relatively less embedded within civil liberties networks, likely making civil liberties norm diffusion more difficult. We suspect that this trend may reflect nations' growing disdain for democracy promotion, particularly civil liberties, following the hypocrisy of the U.S. war on terror. The Supplemental Information provides a full list of sample countries by network and degree centrality values for the overall DINGO network. All network centrality values, as well as scripts and data can be found at the project's Open Science Framework page at <https://osf.io/tmhw3/>.

Each network contains a set of “nodes” (i.e., countries) connected by “edges” (i.e., shared DINGO memberships), which enable democratic norms to travel across borders. Countries with more total edges, quantified as degree centrality, therefore experience an expedited flow of democratic norms, to which they become increasingly socialized by DINGOs (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). To enable

comparisons across network categories, we normalize country degree scores from 0 (a country has no edges) to 1 (a country has all possible edges) and plot their distributions by year. Although we considered alternative centrality measures, we prioritize degree because it best enables us to compare the overall distribution of centrality scores across time and network category (rather than, for instance,

drawing specific between-country comparisons on the basis of relative positionality, for which eigencentrality is a better fit) (Paxton et al. 2015). Finally, we plot trend lines for graph density. As a network-level measure of integration, graph density measures the proportion of *existing* edges in a network relative to the total number of *possible* edges. Because we normalize degree, and because our networks are undirected (i.e., norms flow across nations in both directions), graph density in this case is equivalent to a network's mean degree. Ranging from 0 (no connections exist) to 1 (all possible connections exist), graph density therefore indicates a network's average interconnectedness, and thus, its overall propensity for norm diffusion. Further discussion of our methods, alternative metrics, and descriptive tables can be found in the Supplemental Information.

Results

Considering Figure 1, all networks are highly interconnected throughout the period, with most nations clustering toward the upper range of values—as the top-heavy, long-tailed violins and density trend lines indicate. Substantively, this suggests that DINGO networks are extremely dense and cohesive, provide abundant opportunities for interaction and efficient information sharing, and enable democratic norms to flow with ease.

On one hand, this makes sense given the might of the democracy promotion enterprise and the high premium the international community places on democratic norms (Carothers 2008). Because democracy is “the only game in town,” it is simply too costly for legitimate nations to refuse relations with DINGOs, leading to high integration. On the other hand, these results seem surprising; how is global democracy in decline (Diamond 2015) when DINGO networks are so densely interwoven? Within well-connected networks, members closely monitor one another, creating immense pressure to conform to convention, often despite its (in)efficacy (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In DINGO networks, this may perpetuate adherence to highly standardized models of democracy, which are often ill-fitting and promote superficial democratization (Carothers 1999; Hyde 2011).

Differences in distribution by DINGO category further complicate this narrative. Variability within the rule of law, general democracy, and overall DINGO networks generally *decreases* over time (barring extreme outliers) as nations converge toward high centrality, rendering high consolidation by the early to mid-2000s (i.e., most countries are well connected and fewer are “left out”). Yet for civil liberties, comparatively more nations remain on the outskirts. Although convergence does occur until 2000, this trend is reversed thereafter as the distribution slightly rewidens. For instance, minimum degree across the period of observation increases from approximately 0.30 to just under 0.80 for general democracy but remains relatively static at about 0.55 for civil liberties. Thus, the flow of civil liberties norms is

possibly less fluid, which may stunt diffusion. Current trends in democracy corroborate this narrative. In its report “Freedom in the World,” Freedom House (2018) reported that “civil liberties around the world deteriorated to their lowest point in more than a decade.”

Although we cannot be certain why these differences emerge, we offer one possible explanation. When America launched its war on terror in the early 2000s, it used democracy promotion as justification, all while violating the rights and liberties of countless citizens abroad. This historical turning point illustrated to the world that democracy promotion had once again become a geopolitical game rather than a normative ideal, illustrating firsthand that *some* governments need only “talk the democracy talk,” without “walking the democracy walk.” This hypocrisy struck a major blow to Western democracy's reputation (Carothers 2008) and may have prompted nations to disengage from civil liberties DINGOs as act of defiance. However, unable to rebuke democracy entirely without losing legitimacy, nations made a strategic choice: remain embedded within networks that require broad, surface-level, or difficult-to-monitor democratic commitments (i.e., overall, general democracy, and rule of law, respectively) and disengage from those perceived as illegitimate (Zakaria 1997). Considering the current global climate, these trends may reflect what is recognized today to be an apparent and rising global hostility toward Western democracy and the broader liberal international order (Ikenberry 2018).

Conclusions

This visualization documents longitudinal trends in nations' degree centrality across four DINGO networks, which are highly dense and interconnected. Although variation in centrality decreases over time for most networks, dispersion remains relatively high for civil liberties, particularly after 2000. Future studies can expand on this work by empirically investigating how different DINGO networks help or hinder democratization.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of data collection and acquisition from Joel Fischer at the Union of International Associations (UIA) as well as Margaret Ross and Thomas Tong. This study additionally benefitted from conversations with Josh Zhang, Jason Jones, and Sonia Giebel.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: National Science Foundation, Grant/Award Number: 2001915.

ORCID iD

Jessica Kim  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3742-921X>

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

References

- Carothers, Thomas. 1999. "Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve." Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for Democracy.
- Carothers, Thomas. 2008. "Does Democracy Promotion Have a Future?" Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Diamond, Larry. 2015. "Facing up to the Democratic Recession." *Journal of Democracy* 26(1):141–55.
- DiMaggio, Paul J., and Walter W. Powell. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." *American Sociological Review* 48(2):147–60.
- Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52(4):887–917.
- Freedom House. 2018. "Freedom in the World 2018." Retrieved December 16, 2023. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FH_FIW_Report_2018_Final.pdf.
- Hyde, Susan D. 2011. *The Pseudo-democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ikenberry, G. John. 2018. "The End of Liberal International Order?" *International Affairs* 94(1):7–23.
- Meyer, John W., John Boli, George M. Thomas, and Francisco O. Ramirez. 1997. "World Society and the Nation-State." *American Journal of Sociology* 103(1):144–81.
- Møller, Jørgen, and Svend-Erik Skaaning. 2012. *Requisites of Democracy: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Explanation*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Paxton, Pamela, Melanie M. Hughes, and Nicholas E. Reith. 2015. "Extending the INGO Network Country Score 1950–2008." *Sociological Science* 2(14):287–307.
- Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* 76(6):22–43.

Author Biographies

Jessica Kim is a political sociologist specializing in global and transnational sociology, norm diffusion, and development. Broadly speaking, her work examines the diffusion of various liberal global norms—including those relating to democracy, women's rights, and the environment—to national policies, practices, and opinions. Specifically, she examines the factors that help and hinder the diffusion process and the ways in which (non)compliance with dominant norms manifests. Her current project explores the complex link between DINGOs and hybrid regimes cross-nationally and over time. She is currently a post-doctoral fellow in the Global Sociology Unit at WZB Berlin in cooperation with the Contestation of the Liberal Script (SCRIPTS) Cluster of Excellence. She received her PhD from Stony Brook University.

Andrew Collins is a computational social scientist and political sociologist interested in STS, social media, and social network analysis. His current work focuses on how individuals' interactions with digital spaces inform their social identity formation, development, and expression. He is a current PhD student in the Department of Sociology at Stony Brook University.