Transnational Backlash and the Deinstitutionalization of Liberal Norms: LGBT+ Rights in a Contested World[1]

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Integration into the international community is typically used to explain liberal outcomes. However, is it possible that such integration can also explain rising illiberalism? Using the case of LGBT+ rights, I argue that backlash to liberal norms is increasingly organized transnationally and that exposure to global norms via integration explains both liberal and illiberal outcomes. I test this argument through extensive original data collection and by using time-series cross-section, multinomial, and cross-lagged panel models. Robust findings reveal how exposure to global norms spurs policy backlashes—not just expansions—depending on how countries are situated within pro- and anti-LGBT+ transnational networks. This study contributes to our understanding of the changing international system by revealing how illiberal actors use mechanisms built by the liberal international community to transnationally organize and advance illiberal norms—ultimately fueling the deinstitutionalization of once-dominant liberal models.

The foundations of the international community are being challenged as countries increasingly enact policies counter to once-dominant liberal values (Bromley et al. 2020). This challenge is occurring through democratic

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backslide, the derision of formal education, protectionist trade policies, and pitting ethnoreligious nationalism against multicultural societies (Kurlantzick 2013; Schofer, Lerch, and Meyer 2022; Búzás 2021). Most notable, though, is the broad dismantling of gender justice programs by leveraging concerns over "gender ideology" to severely restrict women's reproductive rights, sex education, and LGBT+ rights (Boyle, Kim, and Longhofer 2015; Hadler and Symons 2018; Htun and Weldon 2018; Lerch et al. 2022). Why is this happening?

While realist scholars present the global redistribution of power via material resources as a key explanation for this moment, "this is more than a power transition: it's also about culture" (Reus-Smit 2017, p. 851). Thus, I provide a culture-based understanding to explain these cross-national events. Drawing on scholarship from neoinstitutionalism, social movements, and constructivist international relations, I argue that the mechanisms used to explain the institutionalization and diffusion of liberal norms also enable the rise of transnational networks composed of illiberal actors who undermine and, ultimately, *deinstitutionalize* such norms as well.

I utilize LGBT+ rights as an ideal case to investigate these (il)liberal cultural divides.[2] First, compared to other cultural scripts, LGBT+ rights are less institutionalized on the world stage (Wilkinson and Langlois 2014). Therefore, these emergent norms can serve as an early barometer of changing forces (Hadler and Symons 2018). Second, LGBT+ rights speak to the core differences between liberal and illiberal cultural models, thus making it a useful lens through which to witness these tensions (Fetner 2008; Weiss and Bosia 2013; Ayoub 2014, 2015; Symons and Altman 2015). Third, examining the strategies and tactics used by illiberal actors to undermine LGBT+ rights can offer insights into how similar actors may counter other norms.

Specifically, I argue that backlash is a transnational process enabled by the development and increased sophistication of illiberal anti-LGBT+

[2] Two notes on language follow. First, I use "LGBT+" as there is no agreed-upon inclusive term amongst transnational advocates. Across contexts, there are preferred alternatives to acknowledge additional communities beyond "LGBT" such as "LGBTI" for intersex, "LGBTQ" for queer, "LGBTT" for the Latin American travesti community, or foregoing explicit identity categories altogether and instead advocating for "SOGIE" rights, meaning sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (Mekler 2018; Velasco and Paxton 2022). Second, while language today is more inclusive and may present each community as equals, this inclusive language can mask within-group inequality and how debates and policies have unfolded historically. Debates typically focused on the regulation of gay men, as men's sex lives were considered part of the public domain while the sex lives of women were considered to be regulated by their husbands in the private sphere (Connell 1990; Frank and Phillips 2013; Frank and Moss 2017). Additionally, concerns most central to transgender and intersex communities are more recent within transnational efforts (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014).

networks. These networks of actors co-opt the strategies and discourses of their pro-LGBT+ counterparts to reframe LGBT+ norms as existential threats to the family and religion, sovereignty and the nation, and/or children's well-being and population demographics. The success and prominence of LGBT+ issues in the global arena, therefore, increase opponents' perceptions of existential threat and motivate them to enact restrictive LGBT+ policies to inhibit the advancement of this threat (regardless of the validity of such claims; see Buss and Herman 2003; Ayoub 2014, 2016, 2019; Boyle et al. 2015; Nuñez-Mietz and García Iommi 2017; Korolczuk and Graff 2018). Consequently, greater country-level integration into the international community—long used to explain the adoption of liberal norms—enables backlash as well. These acts of backlash then feed into a *deinstitutionalization* of pro-LGBT+ norms on the world stage by fueling direct challenges and weakening perceptions of legitimacy. To get a full account of how global norms influence domestic policies, then, it is imperative to consider how a country is simultaneously positioned within the "twin countervailing forces" of supportive and opposing networks (Hadler and Symons 2018, p. 1725).

I test this argument by analyzing how country-level embeddedness in pro- and anti-LGBT+ transnational advocacy networks influences the adoption and implementation of LGBT+ policies across 152 countries from 1990 to 2018. To do so, I first create original data sets measuring transnational pro- and anti-LGBT+ networks longitudinally and a policy index that tracks changes in the adoption, scope, and implementation of 18 progressive and regressive LGBT+-related laws. Results across time-series cross-sections, pooled multinomial logistic regressions, and cross-lagged panel models provide converging evidence for the arguments presented above. Consequently, this project gives new insights into transnational explanations for where and why backlash and resistance occur while contributing new data sets to allow further investigations by the scholarly community.

Most studies of world culture, particularly from a world society perspective, focus on mechanisms and processes through which liberal norms diffuse (though this is now shifting; see Boyle et al. 2015; Bromley et al. 2020; Lerch et al. 2022). This focus results in a characterization of the international community as inherently liberal and integration as a productive way to advance liberal norms (see also Wimmer 2021). Acts of resistance or backlash are characterized as disparate events motivated by domestic conditions (Ayoub 2016; Frank and Moss 2017). In contrast, my findings reveal that a transnational network of anti-LGBT+ actors, anchored across governmental, religious, and civil society actors such as the World Congress of Families, Alliance Defending Freedom International, the Vatican, and Putin's Russia, are similarly utilizing, even co-opting, the structures and mechanisms in the international system to coordinate the transnational diffusion of LGBT+ backlash (Boyle et al. 2015; Korolczuk and Graff 2018). This

results in the deinstitutionalization of LGBT+ norms in the international arena while further supporting and legitimizing alternative cultural models like the preservation of corporate bodies such as traditional families, nation, and religion over individual gender and sexual autonomy. The conceptual framework developed in this analysis can be used to understand the retrenchment of a range of liberal norms as the composition of the international community is increasingly populated by actors promoting illiberal cultural models.

TOWARD A GENERALIZED THEORY OF NORM CHANGE WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

I begin by briefly introducing a general understanding of norm change in the international community before using the case of LGBT+ rights to explicate the process in more detail. Existing scholarship focuses on the emergence, institutionalization, and diffusion of liberal norms—or standards of appropriate behavior that operate in large part on the "logic of appropriateness" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). I contribute to this discussion by highlighting how the recent formation of illiberal actors into sophisticated transnational networks results in the deinstitutionalization of existing norms and the propagation of alternative cultural models. I root my conceptual framework in a cultural perspective because the present crisis of liberalism is deeply cultural and not only fueled by changes in material power between nation-states like the United States and China (Reus-Smit 2017; Búzás 2021). As such, changing norms (and ultimate policies) cannot be conceptually disentangled from the cultural ideas that enable them.

A broad body of scholarship investigates how norms emerge, institutionalize, and diffuse—the "norm life cycle" in the language of Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (2013). Scholars do so by pulling from multiple theoretical traditions such as neo-institutionalism, social movements, field theory, and constructivist international relations (Meyer et al. 1997; DiMaggio 1988; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Halliday and Carruthers 2007; Levitt and Merry 2009; Fligstein and McAdam 2011; Chorev 2012; Lim 2021; Wimmer 2021). Though the entirety of the process is complex, here, I focus on how global-local feedback loops are instrumental to the consolidation and institutionalization of norms (DiMaggio 1988; Tsutsui 2018), or what Halliday and Carruthers (2007) refer to as the "recursivity" of global norms making.

To understand the diffusion of norms, scholars often utilize world society theory, a neoinstitutional perspective that turns to the cultural environment in which actors are embedded to explain cross-national similarities (Meyer et al. 1997). This line of scholarship is closely aligned with the diffusion of liberal norms (e.g., values of universalism, rationality, secularism, multiculturalism, individualism; see Meyer et al. 1997; Boli and Thomas 1999). This pairing is understandable considering the development of the

liberal international order following World War II and spiking after the Cold War (Ikenberry 2018). These new cultural beliefs were advanced by several developments, such as the proliferation of international institutions, an infrastructure for facilitating global information flows and travel, and demographic transitions like mass education and urbanization putting populations in contact with new cultural ideas (Meyer et al. 1997; Pierotti 2013; Boyle et al. 2015). Consequently, a robust area of scholarship investigates how institutional, cultural, and demographic changes iteratively transformed modern societies (e.g., diffusing human rights [Cole 2012], democracy [Torfason and Ingram 2010], higher education [Schofer and Meyer 2005], trade [Hafner-Burton 2005], women's rights [Paxton, Hughes, and Green 2006], and even the nation-state structure itself [Li and Hicks 2016]). However, the extensive focus on diffusion suggests a unidirectional, global-to-local pathway, and a "black box" around script emergence itself (Kentkelenis and Seabrooke 2017).

Another strand of research does highlight the bidirectional relationship between international norms and domestic contexts. Tsutsui (2017) demonstrates these processes using the case of the global human rights regime in Japan. Drawing on DiMaggio (1988), Tsutsui details how success in local movements is imperative for the consolidation and reproduction of human rights norms. If local movements are successful in getting the state to comply with normative standards, the norm's overall legitimacy is strengthened, especially when local movements continue to dedicate focus and resources on the issue. Moreover, local movement actors with transnational connections often choose to continue engaging the global human rights regime to expand norms in new directions. Across multiple fields, scholars highlight how recursivity is imperative to supporting, developing, and consolidating norms (Boyle et al. 2015; Halliday and Carruthers 2007; Halliday and Shaffer 2015; Stimmer 2019; Zimmerman 2017).

Because of the recursivity of this process, resistance and failure to enact compliance with norms can severely disrupt institutionalization. Numerous case studies document how and why global norms incur resistance (Ayoub 2014; Bloomfield and Scott 2017). An international norm's perceived threat can spur countermovements to resist change (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Ayoub 2014; McCright and Dunlap 2000; Ayoub and Chetaille 2020). For example, proponents of whaling in Japan reject antiwhaling norms by presenting them as a threat to the symbolic importance of national identity and tradition (Epstein 2008). Some degree of contestation around a norm is expected (Risse et al. 2013) and can even aid adoption by increasing the visibility and saliency of an issue through public debate (Ayoub 2016; see McKeown [2009] for an alternative perspective). The important element, however, is that proponents leverage partners and resources to ensure that norm rejection is minimal or temporary.

Several levers exist to achieve norm compliance. One key advantage proponents have is the ability to mobilize international networks of intergovernmental organizations, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), nation-states, and so on to target nonresponsive governments on their behalf (e.g., what Keck and Sikkink [1998] refer to as *boomerang effects*). Another pathway shown to overcome resistance is to increase the number of *norm brokers* or "rooted cosmopolitans" who are equipped to translate global norms for local audiences to ensure resonance (Merry 2006; Levitt and Merry 2009; Ayoub 2016). Consequently, "as a country increases its involvement in international society, the impact of global models in that country grows" (Tsutsui 2017, p. 1055). And since the "international" is largely defined as liberal, proponents have an incentive to increase connections and to widen channels of socialization.

But what occurs when resistance cannot be minimized and backlash spreads instead? Moreover, what if it is precisely integration into the international community that causes this defiance? These questions invite the core intervention of the present research: how the transnationalization of backlash is leading to the deinstitutionalization of liberal norms embedded in the world society.

Rising illiberalism presents a significant social concern and is emblematic of the transition to a postliberal international system (Ikenberry 2018; Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Bromley et al. 2020; Búzás 2021; Lerch et al. 2022). These global realities necessitate a revaluation of norms, especially considering that "what drives norm contestation in general and the growing contestation of liberal norms in the international system today in particular, tends to remain underspecified" (Bettiza and Lewis 2020, p. 3).

Therefore, I argue that there is a transnationalization of backlash occurring whereby countries are actively implementing policies that transgress liberal norms—not just resisting them. This backlash is enabled by the development of robust illiberal transnational networks amounting to a transnational countermovement in response to liberal actors shifting the scale and arena of contention upward (Fligstein and McAdam 2011; Bob 2012; Almeida and Chase-Dunn 2018; Andrews 2002; Velasco, forthcoming). These illiberal actors engage in similar processes of norm diffusion such as the strategic rearticulation of norms through vernacularization to fit particular contexts, but they intentionally vernacularize, or "translate," norms to have antithetical resonance with local audiences. This antithetical resonance then induces perceptions of threat within domestic populations and motivates the necessity of a state policy response (Ayoub 2019; Nuñez-Mietz and García Iommi 2017). As such, the long-held assumption that increasing exposure to the international community is productive toward enacting liberal reforms is greatly challenged, because the characterization of the "international community" (and the actors comprising it) is itself changing. Because liberal norms need

shared recognition to carry weight, the adoption of illiberal alternatives not only validates an alternative model, but it also necessarily weakens liberalism as the shared recognition of legitimacy wanes. Thus, deinstitutionalization occurs as the assumed appropriateness of liberalism—the norm that guides behavior, policy, and individual attitudes—weakens. This weakening results in having to reengage debates once presumed to be settled (e.g., the value of democracy) and the active adoption of behaviors, policies, and attitudes that transgress liberal values (e.g., the elimination of the independence of judiciaries).

What enables these illiberal networks' newfound success is their tactical sophistication. For example, the strategic coordination of illiberal actors into a transnational *network* structure to target both international arenas and state governments is recent (Buss and Herman 2003; Friedman 2003; Chappell 2006; Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Corredor 2019; Cupać and Ebetürk 2020;Velasco, forthcoming). Additionally, Sanders (2016) highlights how these transnational actors "forum shop." Namely, illiberal actors seek out national contexts that are conducive for backlash in order to develop a high-profile "win." This win is then used to demonstrate the legitimacy of opposition and spur similar actions elsewhere. Further, some immediate contestation and resistance to liberal norms is expected and may be the result of organic, local organizing. Now, however, an international infrastructure is available to add additional support and to then communicate the success of this event to international allies as a model for replication. These feedback loops are supported by alternative networks of INGOs, nation-states, multilateral institutions, and epistemic communities (as I highlight below). Moreover, these actors diffuse their cultural frames just like their liberal counterparts: lobbying international organizations, coordinating conferences, issuing reports, and so on. The result is to deinstitutionalize liberal norms while simultaneously institutionalizing an alternative model, reflecting and further perpetuating norm polarization (Symons and Altman 2015).

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTESTED CASE OF LGBT+ RIGHTS

In advance of the quantitative analyses, this next section uses LGBT+ rights as an ideal lens through which we can observe norm change in the international system. First, given that this issue is less institutionalized than others, LGBT+ norms can serve as an early barometer prior to effecting more reinforced liberal norms. As such, if the changes outlined above do not occur, there may be less reason for concern that liberal norms are receding in the face rising illiberalism. Second, the subject matter at hand—gender and sexuality—speaks to the heart of the liberal/illiberal divide and thus can illuminate the cultural tensions at work (Korolczuk and Graff 2018).

Liberal Norms and the Expansion of LGBT+ Rights

Integral to the post–World War II liberal values system is the "global sacralization of the individual" (Mathias 2013, p. 1255). As Mathias describes, "This historical sacralization process has entailed a transformation in the world cultural model for the legitimate nation-state. Global individual sacrality reconfigured states' responsibility to their citizens" (p. 1255). Today, this sacralization is the basis for a broad human rights regime that logically extends to protecting individuals based on all facets of personhood: age, ability, sexuality, gender, race, nationality, creed, faith. It also underpins motivations for democratic and educational expansion (Elliott 2014). The supremacy of the individual reconfigures bodies such as the nation and family away from a corporate whole greater than the sum of its parts to, instead, a collective built via the free association of individuals. Indeed, mass education programs, urbanization, increased access to international media and travel, and the reconfiguration of heteronormative family structures are all derived from and further fueled by the cross-national diffusion of liberal models (Meyer et al. 1997; Pierotti 2013; Boyle et al. 2015).

A key ramification of this new individualization is that it shifted cultural understandings around sexuality, gender, and, increasingly, sex characteristics—all elements of personhood that are today part of broader LGBT+ rights promotion. For example, "sex shifted from an activity meant to propagate the collective order through sanctioned reproduction to an activity meant to enhance individual pleasure through self-expression" (Frank, Camp, and Boutcher 2010, p. 871). Especially after the sexual revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, these developments challenged the relationship between sex/gender and the state (De la Dehesa 2010; Frank and Moss 2017; Richardson 2017).

To change how states governed individuals' lives, LGBT+ activists increasingly saw transnational activism as imperative to overturning hostile domestic policies, targeting international institutions via Keck and Sikkink's boomerang models (Keck and Sikkink 1998). In 1978, for example, activists from several countries founded a leading international LGBT+ organization, then called the International Gay Association (now ILGA; Paternotte 2016). ILGA made targeting international bodies a central component of their organizing tactics to help legitimize their cause in sympathetic arenas since the decisions by international organizations carry implicit and explicit messages to member states on appropriate behaviors (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Several developments made transnational advocacy by LGBT+ proponents feasible. One important development was HIV/AIDS. This pandemic created an opening for advocates to force international organizations working on public health to recognize and provide resources toward the distinct health needs for those engaging in same-sex sexual activities (McKay

2016). Additionally, the prior development of a robust international women's movement provided an organizing infrastructure for LGBT+ rights to both work through and imitate. The 1985 World Conference of Women in Nairobi, for example, was the first time that sexual minorities, specifically lesbians, were mentioned in a speech; the 1995 conference in Beijing was the first UN gathering to recognize lesbian organizations (Paternotte and Seckinelgin 2016).

Today, LGBT+ activists have made strides advancing their claims in the UN, the European Union, the World Bank, and the Organization of American States (OAS), among others (O'Flaherty and Fischer 2008; Wilkinson and Langlois 2014; Paternotte 2016;Velasco 2018). Though, certainly, success across these institutions varies, especially by region (Encarnacion 2014; Paternotte 2016; Gonsalves 2021). Nevertheless, LGBT+ rights are seen as the "apex" of modern human rights discourse by some scholars—making the acceptance and support of LGBT+ rights synonymous with being a 21st-century state (Rahman 2014, p. 279). The following quotation from then–U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on International Human Rights Day in 2011 is a key symbolic gesture demarcating the arrival of LGBT+ rights on the international agenda: "Like being a woman, like being a racial, religious, tribal, or ethnic minority, being LGBT does not make you less human. And that is why gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights" (Wilkinson and Langlois 2014, p. 250).

From this, I follow Nuñez-Mietz and Garcia Iommi (2017, p. 200) in defining global LGBT+ norms as "a set of principled proscriptions and prescriptions bound together by the ideal of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity." I follow this definition as it is not tied to a specific policy and allows the manifestations of the underlying norm to vary appropriately by national context.

Panel A in figure 1 highlights the expansion of supportive LGBT+ policies. These trends follow typical arguments around the expansion of liberalized norms: domestic policy outcomes reflect the success of transnational advocates advancing supportive norms in international bodies.[3] Indeed, as Tsutsui (2017) argues, these policy expansions and norm institutionalizations coincide with and are reinforced by the formation of domestic LGBT+ movements as well (Gonsalves 2021; Gonsalves and Velasco 2022). Costa Rica represents one illustrative example of these recursive processes. In 2017, Costa Rica requested an advisory opinion from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights regarding how OAS standards around gender identity and

[3] Of course, while I focus on the present era, it is important to acknowledge that LGBT+-related politics have deep historical roots in international relations. Therefore, to understand modern LGBT+ organizing, both sympathetic and oppositional, it is important to remember that sexual and gender politics are an enduring feature of international relations—not just a late-20th-century/21st-century phenomenon (Frank and Moss 2017).

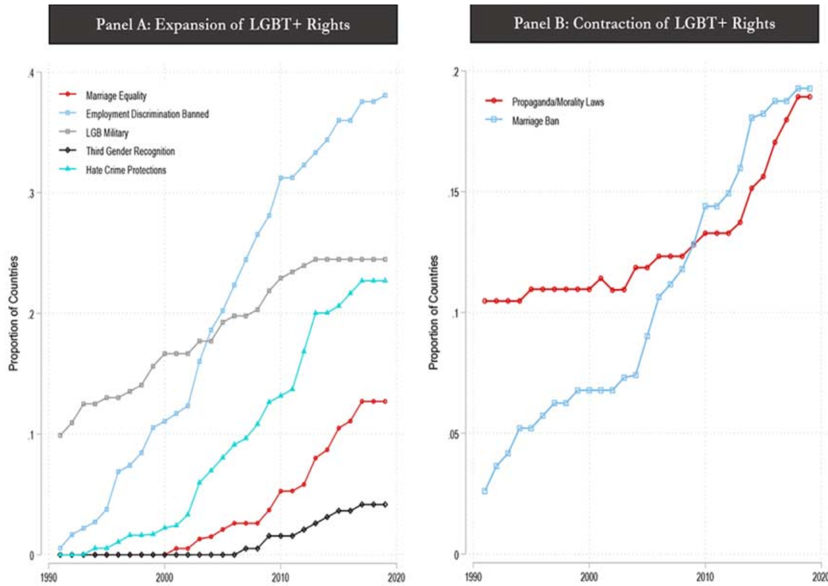

FIG. 1.—The global expansion and contraction of select LGBT+ rights, 1990–2018

same-sex partnerships apply to domestic law after demands from domestic organizations. The court ruled that sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are categories protected by the OAS's equality and non-discrimination guarantees. Since then, Costa Rica, Brazil, and Ecuador have cited this decision while expanding rights for LGBT+ populations (Cabrera 2020*a*, 2020*b*): this is an example of the recursivity of global norms making.

Panel B demonstrates the necessity to incorporate backlash into theorizations of norm change as the advancement of regressive policies are increasingly globalized. Simultaneously as some rights were being expanded, the *contraction* of rights also occurred. How is it that countries embedded in the same global normative environment can take divergent responses to this pressure? I argue that it is due to the growth of illiberal, anti-LGBT+ networks reframing what global LGBT+ norms mean and, as evidenced by the recent downturn in the adoption of LGBT+ rights, deinstitutionalizing LGBT+ norms by challenging their legitimacy.

Rising Illiberalism and Transnationalizing Backlash to LGBT+ Rights

Next, I describe the structural conditions that enabled the rise of illiberal networks, how anti-LGBT+ actors culturally frame their opposition, and,

finally, how these processes enable domestic backlash and feeds back into *(de)institutionalization* processes at the international level.

I conceptualize anti-LGBT+ networks as varied, multidimensional, and loosely connected sets of actors with potentially competing interests but currently aligned toward a mutual goal of countering the advancement of LGBT+ rights while promoting an alternative cultural agenda. What makes these networks *illiberal* is the dual strategy of attempting to undermine the core logic of individualism that underlies LGBT+ rights in the larger human rights regime (Velasco 2018) while promoting the supremacy of traditional corporate bodies (e.g., family, nation, faith) as justification (Ayoub 2019; Frank and Moss 2017; Korolczuk and Graff 2018).

Structural Foundations of Illiberal, Anti-LGBT+ Networks

Illiberal, anti-LGBT+ networks represent a transnational countermovement emerging in response to the success of LGBT+ activists (Almeida and Chase-Dunn 2018; Andrews 2002; Ayoub and Chetaille 2020; McCrights and Dunlap 2000; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Velasco, forthcoming). LGBT+ activists' transnational coalitions shifted the scale of contention upward and changed the political opportunity structure such that countermovements could also emerge at the same scale (Andrews 2002; Fetner 2008; Bob 2012). Moreover, drawing on work at the intersection of movements and institutions (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Schneiberg and Lounsbury 2008; Fligstein and McAdam 2011), it is evident that transnational illiberal networks are the products of their institutional environment even as they seek to displace the cultural values that facilitated their development.

Though the catalyst for anti-LGBT+ networks was the success of pro-LGBT+ activists, particularly during the 1990s, their formation cannot be disentangled from other structural factors at play. For example, since the UN created a pathway to enable civil society organizations to lobby its institutions, the number of INGOs exploded (Boli and Thomas 1999). These organizations are theorized to be cultural carriers of the world society: promoters and diffusers of typically liberal cultural models (Boli and Thomas 1999). However, the peak of the liberal order following the end of the Cold facilitated the dramatic expansion of NGOs This period also contributed to the NGO-ization of conservative and faith-based organizations focused on "adapting, displacing or even rejecting international standards" (Boesenecker and Vinjamuri 2011, p. 347). Although illiberal actors have long been present, this NGO-ization, coupled with co-opting the tactics of their liberal counterparts through sophisticated transnational organizing, enabled their newfound success (Bob 2012).

Anti-LGBT+ actors intentionally contest international institutions and states across the global arena through transnational coalitions. In 1995, U.S. and

Russian academics developed the World Congress of Families to better coordinate and anchor efforts among "traditional family" advocates (Friedman 2003; Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Stoeckl 2020). The inaugural congress in 1997 brought together over 700 organizations and made it clear the UN was a primary target with keynote addresses titled "What Effect Have United Nations Actions Had on the Family?" and "Practical Lessons from UN Conferences: Cairo, Beijing, Istanbul, and Rome." Since then, the World Congress of Families has held 10 world congresses, each larger than before, and now sponsors a robust series of regional conferences that, in total, have brought together over 3,000 different organizations (Southern Poverty Law Center 2019). The U.S. Southern Poverty Law Center (2019) considers the World Congress of Families the premier international anti-LGBT+ organization.

Targeting the UN continues to be a central organizing tactic to subvert LGBT+ norms and promote an alternative normative agenda. In 2008, a set of NGOs, religious leaders, and state actors came together to create the UN Family Rights Caucus. According to its website, the caucus's mission is "to protect and promote the natural family as the fundamental unit of society as called for in Article 16 of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights" (UN Family Rights Caucus 2019). Since then, more "profamily" networks have emerged within the UN, including the Civil Society for the Family and the Group of Friends of the Family, that work to advance their agenda by lobbying officials, supporting resolutions, and utilizing human rights instruments. For example, between 2008 and 2016, 33 member states issued 136 recommendations to strengthen the "natural" or "traditional" family during the Universal Period Review (UPR-Info 2020). By co-opting human rights discourse and transnational organizing structures, these illiberal actors are able to muddy the normative landscape and give states an outlet to simultaneously deny LGBT+ norms while demonstrating adherence to international standards—just *other* standards as promoted by the UN Family Rights Caucus. In other words, working to further institutionalize traditional family norms in the international community gives member states cover for anti-LGBT+ animus and policies that transgress pro-LGBT+ norms.

Today, illiberal anti-LGBT+ networks are broad and diverse, consisting of INGOs, multilateral organizations, religious leaders, political elites, media corporations, academics, think tanks, and policy institutes. Over time, other conference and network systems have developed to create an alternative international community. For example, the Political Network for Values (2020) is "a global platform and resource for legislators . . . aimed at collaborating as a network on a local and global level by actively defending . . . protection of human life, marriage, family or religious freedom and conscience." A common perception is that illiberal actors shun the international to focus

domestically. That, clearly, is not the case. Again, as a product of their institutional environment, these actors are not immune from the overwhelming structures that promote and advance globalization (Almeida and Chase-Dunn 2018).

Antithetical Vernacularization: Translating LGBT+ Norms as Threats

Once organized, how do these illiberal actors frame their opposition to LGBT+ rights? Just as processes of *vernacularization* are imperative for successful resonance with liberal norms, *vernacularization* by illiberal *brokers* is instrumental for backlash. Additionally, analyzing their frames once again demonstrates how the dominant language and structure of the liberal world society produces particular types of counterframes as well.

Opponents of LGBT+ rights, and gender justice more broadly, claim such norms are a fundamental threat to society (Boyle et al. 2015; Htun and Weldon 2018; Korolczuk and Graff 2018). As an attempt to bring coherence to the various facets of these arguments, rooted in different religious, historic, and cultural justifications, I organize them around three key themes (these themes are certainly not mutually exclusive). LGBT+ are seen to threaten the following aspects of society: (1) traditional, religious definitions of the family and of gender roles; (2) the sovereignty of the nation and its right to self-determination; (3) the well-being, innocence, and very procreation of children.

According to these illiberal actors, the first threat LGBT+ rights present is to the “family.” Because the family is the fundamental social unit of society, opponents argue, LGBT+ norms present an existential threat to society itself (Asay and DeFrain 2012). Of course, to understand this line of argumentation, it is imperative to properly define how the “family” is constructed in anti-LGBT+ discourse, as LGBT+ people are certainly interested in building and maintaining families. Anti-LGBT+ actors do not see the family as the free association of individuals; instead, the “family” is a corporate body. As such, anti-LGBT+ actors (e.g., Human Life International, Mormon World Family Policy Center, Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute) use a “traditional,” heterosexual definition of the family, which they deem “natural” (Boyle et al. 2015). The “traditional” or “natural” family is not just a structural term (e.g., one man, one woman with, preferably, their own biologically produced children), but it also defines the substantive content of the family through clearly prescribed gender roles (Buss and Herman 2003).

Proponents of this model typically justify it by appealing to religious doctrine, traditional values, or natural law (Buss and Herman 2003; Lee 2016). For example, the Vatican under Pope John Paul II first used and popularized

the term "gender ideology" as a way of dismissing liberal norms around gender equality (Vaggione 2020). In 2002, the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Family claimed that gender ideology "has led to a misunderstanding of the complementary difference between man and woman and 'a growing confusion about sexual identity' that 'complicates the assumption of roles and sharing of tasks in the home'" (Corredor 2019, p. 615). Consequently, cultural ideas challenging heterosexual definitions of family and traditional gender roles are not just an affront to social cohesion but also a direct challenge to God. Drawing on religious doctrine from multiple faiths, the Vatican continues to partner with evangelical, Muslim, and Orthodox Christian and Jewish communities (e.g., the "unholy alliance" [Cupać and Ebetürk, 2020, p. 703) to mobilize actors against LGBT+ norms (Chappell 2006; Boyle, Golden, and Liao 2017; Corredor 2019). Of course, proponents need not just appeal to religion to justify the heteronormative family structure. Appealing to tradition, such as citing "Asian values," is common (Lee 2016). Even the term "natural family" itself indicates an appeal to secular "natural law" (Stoeckl 2020). De-emphasizing religious underpinnings is common, reflecting the need for anti-LGBT+ actors to use the discourse of the liberalized public sphere (Boyle et al. 2015). For example, on their website, the UN Family Rights Caucus (2019; emphasis added) explicitly states: "While a number of our member organizations represent various religious faiths, the U.N. Family Rights Caucus is *not* a religious-based organization. The positions and policies we adopt are based on what has been *proven* to bring the *best outcomes* for men, women, and children and thus society."

Second, in calling back to the legacies of colonialism and foreign imposition, anti-LGBT+ proponents argue that LGBT+ norms are a threat to national sovereignty (Frank and Moss 2017; Dreier 2018; Tschantret 2020). At the UN's International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, Christian and Muslim civil society actors passed out leaflets saying "speak out or surrender your sovereignty" to disrupt platform agreements they saw as too supportive of abortion and homosexuality (Friedman 2003, p. 326). As the international space and global institutions have grown in their support for LGBT+ rights, so too has this line of argumentation. For example, in Poland and other post-Communist states, opponents of LGBT+ rights argue that these new norms are an external imposition by the European Union (Ayoub 2014; O'Dwyer 2018). Across Africa, several leaders draw on legacies of imperialism to argue that LGBT+ norms are fundamentally "un-African" (Currier 2010; Nuñez-Mietz and García Iommi 2017; McEwan 2017; Dreier 2018). Moreover, the push to eradicate HIV/AIDS makes this argument more salient, particularly in these sub-Saharan countries as local sexual health and LGBT+ organizations increase financial ties to Western donors for public health purposes (Angotti, McKay, and

Robinson 2019). Consequently, in some African countries, anti-LGBT+ opponents find allies with those worried about neoimperialism across the political spectrum (Currier 2010). But beyond such African nations, reliance on foreign aid dollars, generally, is seen to accentuate these neo-imperialism arguments (Velasco 2020). Additionally, the promotion of national sovereignty and self-determination as a framing device is powerful because it is a protected norm in Article 1 of the UN Charter (Reisman 1990), which portrays resistance as legitimate and supported by liberal international institutions. This line of argumentation is heightened as nationalism grows; even though, ironically, nationalists seeking to counter global values have also increased their transnational linkages (Motadel 2019).

Of course, even though some actors raise a secular argument based on international agreements and norms, some actors also make sovereignty claims based on religious grounds. For example, in 1998, Botswana expanded their criminalization of sodomy to include women as well as men. In response to international denouncement, Botswana's Evangelical Fellowship, "expressed disgust at the efforts of 'so-called pressure groups and foreign elements to have our laws changed to accommodate such animalistic and satanic acts under the pretext of human rights'" (as quoted in Frank and Moss 2017, p. 958).

The third threat is to the well-being, innocence, and procreation of children. Scientific, rational framing is most evident in this set of threats. Opponents argue LGBT+ norms threaten children in two ways. First, anti-LGBT+ actors appeal to norms established through the Convention on the Rights of the Child to argue that societies should not allow same-sex partners to be parents because they are worse for children than opposite-sex parents and thus a violation of this treaty, a claim made by discredited science (Perrin et al. 2013). To make these claims possible, academics and professionals, fundamental to the network, are often invited to present at World Congress of Families conferences (McEwan 2017). As another example, the American College of Pediatrics, founded in 2002, is a conservative organization arguing that "gender ideology" hurts children and goes so far as to claim that recognizing transgender identities is an active form of child abuse (Cretella, Van Meter, and McHugh 2018), thus such recognition violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Another way LGBT+ norms are argued to threaten children is by putting their very existence at risk and creating a "demographic winter" (Trimble 2013). Anti-LGBT+ actors argue that since same-sex partners allegedly cannot reproduce, they put future population growth in jeopardy. Fertility rates and demographic tables are now valued cultural objects in these endeavors. As Trimble (2013) highlights, this argument is rooted within deeply racialized, imperialist logics, since the true worry of opponents are fears of the "Great Replacement." This theory contends that the liberalization of gender and sexuality norms will reduce white populations within Western

countries considering that nonwhite communities maintain higher rates of childbirth (Foster and Kirke, forthcoming). It is no coincidence, then, that it was at the UN's International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 where transnational anti-LGBT+ actors first started coordinating. Accordingly, demographers and population research centers hold prominent roles within anti-LGBT+ networks to assist with the secular, pseudo-scientific framing of their opposition. An instrumental organization that lobbies in the UN, the Center for Family and Human Rights (previously the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute) published a memo in 2011, written by a Ph.D. holder and titled "Promoting Life and Family: The Ultimate Solution to Eastern Europe's Demographic and Economic Crisis," that states:

> Today Europe faces a demographic crisis that requires a cultural remedy. Increasingly the answer becomes clear: a culture that esteems the covenant of marriage and the sanctity of life must be re-embraced. . . . *Hungary* is taking a particularly bold approach by embracing pro-family and pro-life values specifically within the text of its new Constitution. Its fundamental text states that "Hungary protects the institution of marriage between man and woman, a matrimonial relationship voluntarily established, as well as the family as the basis for the survival of the nation. Hungary supports child-bearing." (Original emphasis)

Global-Local Feedback Loops: (De)Institutionalizing Norms and Inviting Backlash

But how does the development of anti-LGBT+ networks result in the contraction of LGBT+ rights and the deinstitutionalization of LGBT+ norms? There are two ways the development of the anti-LGBT+ network facilitates backlash. First, these transnational networks provide material resources and discursive frames to local allies. Sanders (2016) shows how U.S. evangelicals, in a case of "forum shopping," made Uganda an explicit target to advance anti-LGBT+ policies. Members of transnational, anti-LGBT+ networks helped organize referenda and protests in Kenya, Romania, Taiwan, and Colombia, just to name a few examples. Beyond explicit campaigns, the circulation of discourses provides common anchor points and framing devices. For example, a Russian lawmaker attempted to remove children from gay and lesbian parents using arguments that cited a discredited study by a U.S. sociologist (Schlatter 2013). The success of LGBT+ advocates and the global circulation of information allows anti-LGBT+ opponents to attack the issue anywhere. Even if there is no internal pro-LGBT+ movement, the awareness of the issue allows anti-LGBT+ forces to argue such demands are inevitable and, thus, pressure the state to respond preemptively (Nuñez-Mietz and García Iommi 2017; Currier and Cruz 2020).

Alternatively, the development of transnational anti-LGBT+ networks opens up a permission structure for political leaders to engage in political

homophobia and/or transphobias for political gain (Weiss and Bosia 2013). If LGBT+ norms were robustly institutionalized, then the international community would sanction such actions—indeed, "naming and shaming" tactics are a critical tool for norm consolidation (Hendrix and Wong 2013). However, if one political leader is rewarded instead of punished, others will be encouraged to follow that example. Moreover, when this does occur, the transnational anti-LGBT+ infrastructure can support these endeavors by buffering any potential sanctions that come in response or, moreover, some leaders even reframe such sanctions as a sign of valor and "proof" they are fighting for national sovereignty (McKay and Angiotti 2016).

The development of these anti-LGBT+ networks mean more countries are now embedded within the illiberal cultural environments they advance. Consequently, this sets the conditions that make backlash more likely. Once backlash does transpire, this then feeds back into the international arena and inhibits the continued institutionalization of pro-LGBT+ norms. These results, when repeated, result in the deinstitutionalizing of existing LGBT+ norms that may already exist and the added support for institutionalizing illiberal models (Cupać and Ebetürk 2020).

CONCEPTUAL MODEL, HYPOTHESES, AND TYPOLOGY OF LGBT+ POLICY CHANGES

Next, I summarize the above arguments through a conceptual model and outline testable hypotheses through an original 2 × 2 typology table. Figure 2 provides a simplified conceptual model. First, global norms circulate within the interational community. Next, opposing transnational networks offer competing interpretations or translations of the norm for domestic audiences.[4] The cultural interpretation that is most salient influences how countries respond, resulting in either compliance with the norm through the expansion of rights or defiance against it via backlash. Notably, the left half of the model tends to be underevaluated within research—leading to the assumption that all integration into the world system and exposure to international norms is productive toward compliance. Countries are not statically for or against LGBT+ rights but are constantly susceptible to these two countervailing forces trying to socialize countries to competing interpretations of LGBT+ norms. Finally, domestic policy outcomes feed back into the broader norm itself—either through further consolidation and institutionalization or through undermining its legitimacy and deinstitutionalization.

[4] It is important to note that while I diagram two opposing networks, both network systems are varied and multidimensional. Although each set of networks are represented by a single arrow, this is not to say either set of networks is a unified, coherent whole. Indeed, the explicit use of "networks" (plural) language is meant to highlight a sprawling set of affiliated actors with varying degrees of shared goals.

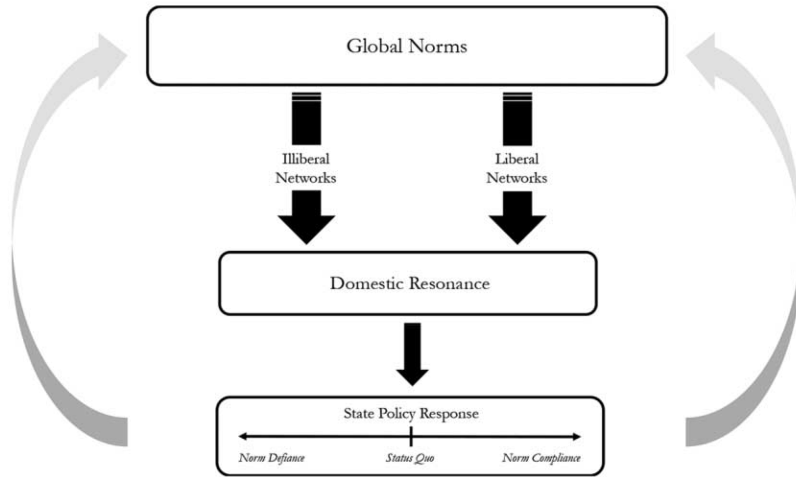

FIG. 2.—Conceptual model predicting state policy response to global norms

I propose two primary sets of hypotheses. First, following standard world society conventions, growing global LGBT+ norms will be associated with more progressive LGBT+ policies. However, as anti-LGBT+ networks develop in response to this increased pressure, they work to muddy the legitimacy of LGBT+ norms and likely diminishe their influence over time. Therefore, I also propose that the effects of pro-LGBT+ norms will wane over time and that they will be associated with all types of policy changes, including backlash.

To reflect the two opposing networks translating global LGBT+ norms down to the domestic space, figure 3 contains a 2 × 2 table outlining a typology of how domestic LGBT+ policies are hypothesized to change based on a country's position within these networks. Countries with low exposure to any normative pressures emanating from the global context, due to having low integration into both pro-LGBT+ and anti-LGBT+ networks, should maintain the status quo and not change policies in either direction. Countries highly embedded within pro-LGBT+ networks and less integrated in anti-LGBT+ networks, however, should comply with global LGBT+ norms and expand LGBT+ policies since the dominant form of translation is occurring through sympathetic actors. Inversely, countries deeply embedded within anti-LGBT+ networks and on the periphery of pro-LGBT+ networks are expected to actively defy global norms and contract LGBT+ rights through backlash policies. Finally, countries that have high exposure through both types of networks should experience periods of contestation in which LGBT+ policies both constrict and expand

Pro-LGBT+ Networks (columns) / **Anti-LGBT+ Networks** (rows)

	Low	High
Low	Status Quo	Compliance
High	Defiance	Contestation

FIG 3.—Typology of state responses to LGBT+ norms based on opposing network embeddedness. Typology of state responses to LGBT+ norms based on opposing network embeddedness.

as these two networks compete to shape the domestic interpretation of LGBT+ norms. By being embedded within both networks, meaningful segments of domestic audiences are likely to be socialized into supporting both cultural interpretations, and policies may therefore oscillate or be contradictory.

DATA AND METHODS

Dependent Variable

To measure a country's LGBT+ policy landscape, I use two distinct measures. First, I score each country annually from 1990 through 2018 on an original LGBT+ Policy Index that I created; the LGBT+ Policy Index captures the implementation of 18 different LGBT+ policies. Following Ayoub (2015, 2016) and Htun and Weldon (2018), I use a range of policies to acknowledge the diversity of ways in which compliance with the underlying LGBT+ norm of nondiscrimination may manifest. For example, decriminalizing same-sex intimacy, allowing LGBT+ people to openly serve in the military, and marriage equality all stem from the same latent idea. This measurement strategy acknowledges that the global push for LGBT+ rights is diverse and varied. Although event history analyses around a single policy are typical within this area of research, such approaches assume the entire movement is oriented around a single policy. Moreover, any country that demonstrates compliance with or defiance against the underlying norm would not be captured by single policy measures, necessarily missing the exact dynamics this article hopes to understand. This index is designed to acknowledge the myriad ways in which movements fight for and against the

TABLE 1
Policies Comprising the LGBT+ Policy Index

Policy	Max Score
Same-sex sexual acts legal	1
Equal age of consent	1
Employment discrimination	1
Hate crime protections	1
Incitement to hatred	1
Civil unions	1
Marriage equality	1
Joint adoptions	1
Gender marker change	1
LGB military	1
Transgender military	1
Ban on conversion therapies	1
Ban on gender assignment surgeries on children	1
Death penalty for same-sex sexual acts	−1
Propaganda laws	−1
Same-sex sexual acts illegal	−1
Unequal age of consent	−1
Ban on marriage equality	−1

underlying norm of human rights irrespective of sexual orientation and gender identity.[5]

Table 1 outlines each policy used to construct the overall index along with each policy's potential value. Policies included in the index are limited to those adopted across at least three countries or are explicitly advocated for by transnational activists (Velasco 2018).

Rather than measuring each individual policy in a binary (adopted/not adopted) scheme, I follow Frank and colleagues (Frank et al. 2010; Frank and Moss 2017) in considering that similar policies (e.g., civil unions) can meaningfully vary in scope, benefits, punishment, and so on. For example, in 2012, Argentina became the first country to allow someone to change their legally recognized gender on government documents based on self-identification alone (i.e., no medical or psychiatric requirements). In Japan, meanwhile, changing one's gender marker is legal, however, this requires sterilization—a requirement the Japanese Supreme Court upheld in 2019. Differences in requirements to change one's gender marker make this policy easily accessible in Argentina and nearly impossible for most Japanese citizens. I also contribute an additional measurement dimension by factoring in a policy's implementation. For example, before 2005, Cameroon had a

[5] Although I acknowledge that an index approach allows for more variation in how the underlying norm is actualized (Htun and Weldon 2018), this approach necessarily misses policy changes that are unique to particular national contexts.

near moratorium on implementing its law criminalizing same-sex acts, but after 2005, Cameroon aggressively began arresting people accused of engaging such behavior—dramatically changing the legal environment (Human Rights Watch 2010). I incorporate dimensions of a law's scope and implementation, in addition to overall adoption, as each element may result from the transnational processes this study seeks to investigate. Relying on binary coding schemes necessarily misses these important types of changes both within and between countries.

Table 2 outlines five different indicators used to determine the robustness of each policy and the individual scoring system for each indicator. The first is the proportion of the total population in 2010, as determined by the World Bank, living under the specific policy. This is to acknowledge important subnational variations (e.g., same-sex marriage laws in the United States). The second is the scope of genders subject to the law. For example, several countries only criminalize same-sex acts between men (Carroll and Itaborahy 2015). In the early 2000s, Botswana and Tanzania both expanded their criminalization of same-sex acts to include women as well (Carroll and Itaborahy 2015). Similarly, when age of consent laws are unequal, they are typically differentiated by gender. The third, which applies to regressive policies, considers the maximum punishment as explicitly stated within the law or penal code. For example, there is considerable variation in the punishment for engaging in same-sex acts, ranging from less than three years in

TABLE 2
Policy Scope and Implementation Indicators and Scoring Schemes

Policy Indicator	Scores
Proportion of population living under law[a]	0–1
Scope of genders subject to law	1.0 = both men and women
	.50 = just men or women
	0.0 = no law
Maximum level of punishment	1.0 = death penalty
	.80 = life in prison
	.60 = >15 years and <life
	.40 = >3 years and <15 years
	.20 = <3 years
	0.0 = no law
Ease of access	1.0 = no barriers
	.75 = little to few barriers
	.50 = moderate barriers
	.25 = significant barriers
	0.0 = no law
Evidence of enforcement	1.0 = evidence of enforcement
	0.0 = no evidence of enforcement

[a] Limited to federal and provincial/regional/state governments only. Policies passed by lower-level jurisdictions like municipalities are not considered.

prison to death by stoning (Carroll and Itaborahy 2015). The fourth indicator is ease of access to the benefits the law outlines. Finally, the last indicator is evidence of enforcement; in other words, is there evidence this law is being implemented? Countries receive a score of 1 if there is at least one case of the law being implemented in the year under investigation or the year prior.

After assembling policy data for all country-year observations, factor scores were used to determine the level of robustness and enforcement of each policy. While all five indicators may not be relevant to each policy, each policy in question uses at least three different indicators. For example, the policy marriage equality uses (1) proportion of population living under the law; (2) ease of access; and (3) evidence of enforcement. To create the factor scores, confirmatory factor analyses were used while holding the variance to 1 so that each policy's score ranged from 0 to 1. Therefore, a score of 1 corresponds to the most robust scope and implementation for that policy. This also means that changes on any one indicator will influence each policy's overall score. Thus, a country having national marriage equality, few (if any) formal restrictions to obtaining a marriage license, and full implementation will receive a score of 1.

To create the index, factor scores for each policy are summed annually, with progressive policies receiving a positive score and regressive policies receiving a negative score. This results in an index ranging from −5 to +13.[6] No country reaches these extremes, which demonstrates that countries can get better and worse in their policy environments. Since 2014, the Netherlands has had the highest score at 11.1, and Nigeria has had the lowest at −3.66. The sample-wide average over the entire time period, however, is 1.5. For context, 1.5 was the United States' score in 2001; in 2018, the United States increased to 8.

The LGBT+ Policy Index represents the most robust and nuanced measure of LGBT+ policy adoption and implementation to date and is itself a novel contribution to the literature. By incorporating both progressive and regressive LGBT+ policies and variation in implementation beyond a binary coding scheme, this measure captures even fine-grained changes to the LGBT+ policy landscape and better assesses the extent to which countries are or are not influenced by transnational processes.

[6] As a robustness check, confirmatory factor analysis was used to determine whether the underlying latent concept was properly captured by each of the policies. The model found all policies to be significantly associated with the underlying latent construct and found each policy to be associated in the direction theorized (i.e., all regressive policies are negatively associated with the latent construct and all progressive policies are positively associated). Models using this latent variable approach yield similar results. Additional models were run that do not consider the five dimensions of each policy but instead use a binary adopted/not adopted scheme; results are substantively similar.

The second measure seeks to understand policy change by placing countries into one of the four change categories presented earlier: status quo (no change), compliance (expansion of rights), defiance (contraction of rights), or contestation (both expansion and contraction occur). Policy change categories are created by pooling three years of LGBT+ Policy Index scores and assessing in which directions the index moves.[7] During the period, if the country only increases its scores, it is placed in the compliance category. If it only decreases its score, it is assigned to the defiance category. If there are changes in both directions during this period, then it is assigned to the contestation category. Last, if no changes occur, then it is categorized as status quo. For example, pooling the changes from 1991 to 1993 allows us to see annual changes that occur from 1990 to 1991, 1991 to 1992, and 1992 to 1993. Therefore, the dependent variable occurs for each country in the sample nine times between 1990 and 2017.

To find the necessary data to construct this index, multiple sources were consulted. The primary data source was the *State Sponsored Homophobia Reports* produced by ILGA. These reports, produced almost annually, outline the adoption of a range of policies and provide some information on implementation.[8] For information on trans- and intersex-specific policies and military information, other sources were used, including the *Trans Legal Mapping Report*, also produced by ILGA, reports and documentation provided by Transgender Europe, Movement Advancement Project, the Hague Center for Strategic Studies LGBT+ Military Index, and academic studies such as Reynolds (2013). Furthermore, to obtain data on the evidence of enforcement—particularly arrests—multiple sources were used, including an extensive newspaper search across each country using LexisNexis and Factiva and other external reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the U.S. State Department.

Independent Variables

Global LGBT+ Context.—Given that capturing a latent, intangible concept (such as norms) with any one indicator is likely to be associated with significant measurement error, I follow Hughes, Krook, and Paxton (2015) in using three distinct indicators to measure global LGBT+ norms (Global LGBT+ Context). The first indicator is the global count of LGBT+ INGOs using data

[7] Additional categories were created using more years within each pool to give greater opportunity for policy changes. Results are substantively similar and robust to various cut points; however, once categories encompass six or more years of change, the statistical power diminishes. The three-year change categories are presented to maximize number of observations while simultaneously giving enough years for all policy changes to occur.

[8] This source is widely used throughout cross-national LGBT+ research because the document explicitly cites the text of the laws. This makes manual validation possible.

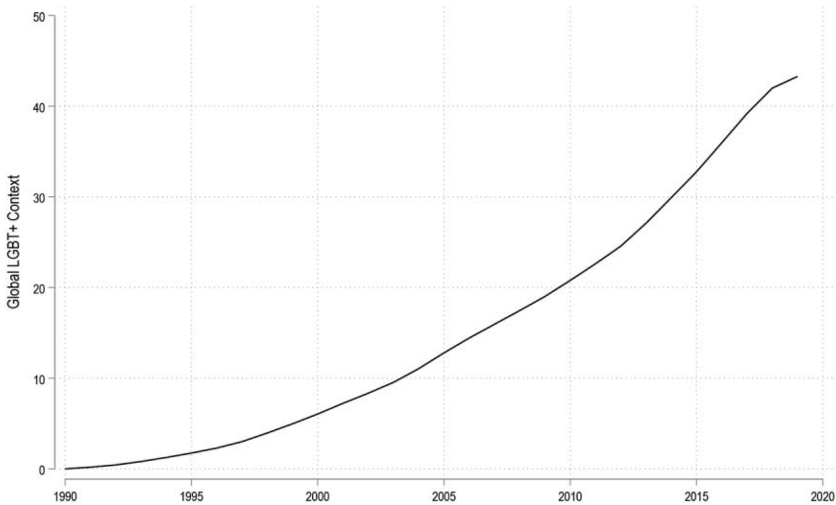

Fig. 4.—Change in the Global LGBT+ Context over time

from the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. INGOs are unique in that they help to establish global culture and also work to diffuse it; therefore, a greater count of INGOs signifies greater interest in such issues and the resources to support more organizations (Boli and Thomas 1999). The second indicator is the count of statements emanating from all UN bodies pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity. The International Commission of Jurists collects all statements (e.g., concluding observations, committee rulings, resolutions, etc.) relating to sexual orientation and gender identity and makes this data publicly available. Finally, the last indicator looks at the role of public discourse. Using LexisNexis and Factiva, I get a global count of all newspapers that mention any aspect of the LGBT+ community.[9] The cumulative count of each variable is used to create factor scores for each time period. This variable is then rescaled so that it has a value of zero in the first year of observation (1990) for ease of interpretation (see fig. 4). A squared term is also included in models to account for the possibility of a nonlinear association.

Pro-LGBT+ Networks.—To measure embeddedness within the global LGBT+ context via liberal, pro-LGBT+ pathways, I use country-level ties to LGBT+ INGOs (Velasco 2018, 2020). INGOs are a common measure of

[9] When developing measures, particularly identifying domestic LGBT+ organizations and relevant newspaper articles, resources across 13 languages were utilized throughout the duration of the project. This was done to try to mitigate against any bias that English-only resources would introduce. Therefore, I consulted resources produced by LGBT+ organizations in their respective languages and consulted with relevant area and language experts.

country-level integration into the global community and the cultural environment they signify (Boli and Thomas 1999). Typically, however, scholarship does not disentangle INGOs by cultural orientation and instead uses overall counts. This obscures important variation and contributes to the assumption that all international exposure is inherently liberal. Using the *Yearbook of International Organizations* (Union of International Associates 1990–2018), I examine the aim and activities of each organization as presented within the *Yearbook* to find evidence of organizations' support of LGBT+ communities, regardless of the substantive focus of the INGO. However, organizations working against LGBT+ communities (e.g., Exodus Global Alliance, which focuses on conversion) are excluded from this measure and recoded as anti-LGBT+. Total counts, or in-degrees, of country-level ties to LGBT+ INGOs are used to measure embeddedness. This measure is standardized according to its z-distribution to compare effect sizes with the anti-LGBT+ measure.

Anti-LGBT+ Networks.—To measure embeddedness within anti-LGBT+ networks, a similar approach is taken. Determining whether an INGO holds anti-LGBT+ views is more difficult than identifying pro-LGBT+ INGOs, given that many anti-LGBT+ INGOs use liberalized language that masks this motivation. Consequently, to identify if an INGO should be properly considered to be part of the anti-LGBT+ network, I first examine participation in conferences sponsored by the World Congress of Families. Given this organization's central role in transnational anti-LGBT+ organizing, participating in their conferences is a clear signal of organizational values. Using programs from each conference the World Congress of Families has held or sponsored, I first identify INGOs that are present within both these programs and the *Yearbook*.[10] Next, I examine each of these INGOs' websites or *Yearbook* listing to find references to partner INGOs and examine each partner organization for anti-LGBT+ animus. Last, using the indices of each *Yearbook*, I examine all INGOs categorized as "Evangelical," "Islamic," "Family," "Children," or otherwise religious to look for those that mimic the language of previously identified anti-LGBT+ organizations. To determine if any of these organizations should be included, I search their aims/missions, websites, and promotional materials for key references. For example, using language such as "natural" or "traditional" families or marriage, "biblical sexuality," or "biological man/woman/sexes" identified organizations as anti-LGBT+. These terms were determined after identifying typical phrases from World Congress of Families attendees' websites and aims. Furthermore, in the

[10] If an organization appears in a program at any point in time, it is counted as an anti-LGBT+ organization – it does not need to appear in a conference program within the specific year of analysis. Therefore, if a country attended a World Congress of Families event in 2006, for example, it is included in the count of anti-LGBT+ INGOs at all time points.

wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to legalize same-sex marriages, Alliance Defending Freedom International, another leading anti-LGBT+ INGO (Bob 2012), directed organizations to include a values statement on their website to justify LGBT+-based discrimination. If any organization included this values statement, or a similar one, it was included.

Finally, after compiling an overall list of anti-LGBT+ INGOs, I revised it to include NGOs, church councils/networks, and parachurch organizations. Churches and educational institutions are excluded from this measure. While churches and church leaders are certainly part of anti-LGBT+ backlash in several countries, their mission (along with universities) is inherently focused on the individual. The organizations included, therefore, are those that have a more public mission and have the capacity to advocate and influence policy. For example, while churches do not typically lobby (and in some countries are explicitly barred from doing so), a church alliance or network itself is not a church. Therefore, the World Evangelical Alliance, which takes explicitly anti-LGBT+ stances and has attended the World Congress of Families, is included in this measure, but the Russian Orthodox Church is excluded.[11] This measure is standardized according to its z-distribution.

Alternative Explanations

To have confidence that domestic policy changes are the result of the theorized transnational processes within the global arena, it is imperative to account for alternative explanations at regional and domestic scales. The control measures below account for alternative explanations and potential confounders.

Regional LGBT+ Context.—To account for regional variations in LGBT+ norms, I measure the number of pro-LGBT+ statements and decisions made by various regional institutions each year. These include items such as supportive resolutions, granting LGBT+ organizations consultative status, or rulings by various bodies affirming protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Regional institutions include Council of Europe, Organisation of American States, Association of Southeast Asian

[11] Based on the above criteria, there are four global churches/denominations that would otherwise be included within the transnational measure: the Roman Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Anglican Communion. When including these entities in the measure, results are consistent. This does not mean religious actors or churches are completely excluded from the measure, though. Indeed, the more common way for churches and religious actors to engage in these transnational efforts is through church alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance, Baptist World Alliance, Association of Member Episcopal Churches in Eastern Africa, Caribbean Conference of Churches, etc.) and religiously motivated missions and parachurch organizations (e.g., African Transformation Movement, Christian Conference of Asia, Engage Now Africa, United World Mission). All these international organizations are included.

Nations, African Union, Arab League, Pacific Islands Forum, and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Data come from each institution's website. While this measure captures pressure from distinct regional institutions, it does not capture regional norms that diffuse through other means (Gonsalves 2021).

Domestic LGBT+ Movement.—Presently, no established longitudinal, cross-national measure of domestic LGBT+ movements exist. However, given that it is important to account for domestic mobilization efforts to isolate the *transnational* effects, I developed an original measure along with my collaborator Tara Gonsalves. This measure is the cumulative count of all domestic LGBT+ organizations, associations, groups, and collectives founded in each country. Developing longitudinal, cross-national measures of different domestic movements is an active area of research (see Forester et al. 2022).

To create this data set, over 200 resources were consulted. First, using the set of LGBT+ INGOs I developed earlier from the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, we retrieved membership rosters from annual reports and websites for as many years could be found. This produced a large number, as ILGA, the leading LGBT+ INGO, has over 1,000 members. Second, we searched government databases of registered charities for the names and mission statements of organizations for keywords that identified them as being LGBT+ related, using the same keywords used to identify LGBT+ newspaper articles. Third, we used the *Encyclopedia of Associations* (Gale 2022). Fourth, we used lists of domestic organizations produced by NGOs and the UN. For example, ILGA has an online directory of thousands of LGBT+ organizations around the world, members and nonmembers. Mama Cash, Arcus Foundation, and Astraea Foundation are three foundations that fund domestic LGBT+ organizations around the world, so we tracked their lists of annual grantees using data from their websites and IRS Form 990 tax filings. Additionally, the UN Development Programme Asia and the Pacific's Being LGBT+ in Asia and the Pacific project produced country-specific reports on LGBT+ life, and each one of these reports includes a list of domestic LGBT+ organizations in each country. Similarly, there are several NGO-sponsored resolutions at the UN that have domestic LGBT+ organizations as signatories. For example, two statements produced by ARC International in 2006 and 2014 were signed by a combined 1,123 organizations. Fifth, when present, we used membership rosters of domestic umbrella organizations, such as the Consortium of LGBT+ Voluntary and Community Organisations in the United Kingdom, which has over 200 members. Sixth, we added to this list from academic books and articles on LGBT+ activism, such as the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of LGBT Issues Worldwide*, especially those that included historical perspectives. Seventh, using the volume of newspaper data produced previously,

we used text analysis techniques to scrape all proper nouns in an effort to find additional LGBT+ organizations—this was particularly helpful to find smaller organizations that may have only made local news and those that were more active in earlier time periods. Eighth, since most sources above may pick up larger and/or more professionalized associations, we searched the websites and social media of each association identified by one of the above resources for references to other groups—typically under a "Partner" or "Alliances" section. Finally, we concluded by doing country-specific Google searches to find any other organizations.

We used several criteria to decide which organizations could be included in this analysis. For example, an organization's existence had to be verified by at least two sources. Additionally, working on behalf of LGBT+ people had to be its primary aim,[12] and the organization needed to be independent. Therefore, an LGBT+ caucus or interest group of a broader union, political party, or workplace was not included. Importantly, we do not qualify inclusion based on a level of professionalization or formal registration given that NGO-ization is an uneven process and that LGBT+ organizations are de facto or de jure banned from registering in several countries (Alvarez 1999). After compiling this list, which included over 11,000 organizations in total, we then determined the founding date of each organization. To do so, we prioritized the organization's self-reported founding date. If the founding date was not reported by the organization or, if registered, by the government, we then used the first known record of the organization (e.g., first newspaper appearance, first reported membership in an INGO, first online presence such as website registration or social media account, etc.). Ultimately, 2,340 organizations were dropped from the analysis because their founding date could not be reasonably determined. From here, cumulative counts of organizations founded over time were created for each country.

There are limits to this approach to measurement. For example, this data set is biased given its reliance on the internet and digitally archived resources and that some LGBT+ organizations wish not to be identified. Additionally, this measure follows previous research in privileging organizations and associations—or the movement infrastructure—over other important aspects of movement strength like financial resources or salience in public discourse. Nevertheless, this represents the most robust measure to date on the strength of domestic LGBT+ organizing over time. This measure is logged due to the skewed distribution.

LGBTQ MPs.—Accounting for LGBTQ members of parliament (MPs) is important, as these MPs may be more inclined to advance LGBT+

[12] See the appendix for additional details.

rights and their elite presence can heighten the saliency of these issues detached from transnational forces. Data on LGBTQ MPs is compiled by the LGBTQ Representation and Rights Initiative (Reynolds 2013). This count includes total number of MPs publicly identified as LGBTQ in each country-year period. MPs are counted starting when they are publicly out, which may not coincide with their year of first election.

Anti-LGBT+ Demonstrations.—Accounting for domestic anti-LGBT+ mobilization is important; therefore, I developed an explicit measure of anti-LGBT+ and "profamily" protests and demonstrations. To develop this measure, I first looked for evidence of such demonstrations within multiple cross-national protest data sets: in particular, Mass Mobilization Protest Data, Nonviolence and Violence Campaigns and Outcomes Data Project, *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators*, and the Social, Political, and Economic Database Project. Next, I used the previously collected newspaper data to search for mentions of anti-LGBT+ and profamily demonstrations in each country. These data result in a variable that is the annual count of such events in each country. Counts were harmonized across the data set so that specific events are only counted once. It is important to acknowledge, however, that there are well-known limitations to cross-national protest event data (Herkenrath and Knoll 2011). The consultation of numerous sources is an attempt to mitigate against some of these biases.

Religiosity.—To measure domestic religiosity, I use the Religious Characteristics of States Dataset Project produced by the Association of Religious Data Archives. This data set provides annual measures from 1900 to 2015 on the domestic population of a range of religious denominations for 220 states and territories. Specifically, I use the percentage of the population identifying as Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant, including Pentecostals. I specifically use these denominations given the existing research connecting these faiths to anti-LGBT+ efforts (Dreier 2018; Cupać and Ebetürk 2020; Currier and Cruz 2020). Because the data set ends in 2015, I take the percentage change from 2014 to 2015 and multiply the 2015 values by this percentage change to get 2016 and 2017 levels of religiosity.[13]

Economic Development.—A significant body of existing research highlights the connection between economic development and the protection of human rights (Inglehart 1997). I use gross domestic product per capita to measure economic development, which is given in constant 2015 U.S. dollars as provided by the World Bank (2019). This variable is logged due to the skewed distribution.

Democracy.—Encarnación (2014) argues that democratization is an important condition to explain the expansion of LGBT+ rights, particularly

[13] For robustness, I also carry forward 2015 values. Results are substantively similar.

in Latin America. To account for this, I include a measure of democracy from the Varieties of Democracy data set, which combines Freedom House and Polity IV rankings. This measure is demonstrated to be an accurate reflection of democracy (Hadenius and Teorell 2005). Scores range from 0 to 10 with higher scores indicating more democratic practices.

% Trade.—Hafner-Burton (2005, 2013) argues that trade as a percentage of GDP is also associated with human rights outcomes. This is because trade agreements may include informal expectations or hard requirements regarding a government's human rights practices. Trade, then, represents another pathway beyond transnational networks through which world culture influences domestic outcomes. This variable is calculated as the summed value of goods and services derived from exports/imports as a percentage of the overall country-level GDP. Data are gathered from the World Bank (2019).

Population.—Population is used to account for the fact that governments are more likely to decrease human rights to better control larger populations (Poe and Tate 1994). This variable is measured as the midyear population and is logged (World Bank 2019).

Sample Construction

To understand how exposure to global LGBT+ norms through LGBT+ and anti-LGBT+ networks influences policy changes, this study assesses LGBT+ policies from 1990 through 2018 for all countries with an average population of at least 500,000 across the observation period. The exclusion of the smallest countries is primarily due to missing observations on key control variables. Countries enter the analysis following recognition from the UN. For the change categories, the pooled nature of the dependent variable means that for the 152 countries included, most have nine observations, resulting in 1,327 country-year observations.

Modeling Strategy

To accurately assess the fundamental research question, three modeling strategies are pursued. First, to assess a country's position on the continuous LGBT+ Policy Index, I use pooled, cross-sectional time series with country fixed effects (Beck and Katz 1995). These fixed-effects models account for time-invariant country-level attributes, such as colonial legacy. These models look at within-country variation for the independent variables to explain within-country variation in the dependent variable—a more conservative estimation which is better for causal inferences (Beck and Katz 1995). All predictor variables are lagged one year.

Second, to predict a country's position within the policy change categories, I use pooled, multinomial logistic regressions since the dependent variable is treated as nonordered (Hilbe 2009). Because the data are pooled over time, models account for heteroskedasticity and the violation of the independence of error assumption through corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995). Pooled multinomials are appropriate when there are no dependencies between categories over time (Sarma and Simpson 2007). Though some pathways are more likely, a country's position at time t does not necessarily prevent it from appearing in any other category at $t + 1$. In these models, Status Quo serves as the reference category. Finally, all predictor variables are lagged to one year prior to the first year of the three-year wave, meaning that the policy change category capturing 2003, 2004, and 2005 are predicted using 2002's values to account for temporal ordering.

The third modeling strategy is to use cross-lagged panel models to assess for direction of influence and the possibility of reciprocal effects. Certainly, a country's existing policy environment may differentially attract these opposing networks, reversing the theorized causal direction. Cross-lagged panels are a longitudinal design that simultaneously model change in independent and dependent variables when they are theorized to be interrelated (Finkel 1995). These models also include stability effects, or the degree to which variables at one time point predict themselves at the next time point (Allison 2005). Therefore, I test whether the continuous LGBT+ Policy Index and pro-/anti-LGBT+ Networks at wave 1 (1995) influence each other at wave 2 (2015). Compared to first two modeling strategies, these models include a more limited sample size and, therefore, a more parsimonious set of controls are used.

RESULTS

Results from the pooled fixed-effects models are presented in table 3. Model 1 includes just the control variables to provide a baseline comparison. The control variables alone account for 47.6% of the within-country variation in LGBT+ Policy Index scores. Nearly every control variable is initially significant and operates as expected. Controls associated with higher scores on the LGBT+ Policy Index are Regional LGBT+ Context ($b = .160$, $P < .001$), Domestic LGBT+ Movement ($b = .890$, $P < .001$), LGBT+Q MPs ($b = .312$, $P < .001$), Anti-LGBT+ Demonstrations ($b = .421$, $P < .05$), Trade ($b = .005$, $P < .01$), and Economic Development ($b = .784$, $P < .001$). Meanwhile, Protestant ($b = -.100$, $P < .01$), Catholic ($b = -.081$, $P < .001$), and Population ($b = -.826$, $P < .001$) are associated with lower scores.

Model 2 includes Global LGBT+ Context and its squared term to test the possibility of nonlinearity. Indeed, as suspected, there is a significant positive association ($b = .149$, $P < .001$). This finding is consistent with

TABLE 3
POOLED TIME-SERIES CROSS-SECTIONS PREDICTING LGBT+ POLICY INDEX WITH COUNTRY FIXED EFFECTS, 1990–2018

Model	1	2	3
Global LGBT+ Context		.149***	.134***
		(.022)	(.022)
Global LGBT+ Context squared		−.002***	−.002***
		(.000)	(.000)
Pro-LGBT+ Networks			.396*
			(.185)
Anti-LGBT+ Networks			.102
			(.276)
Regional LGBT+ Context	.160***	.016	−.026
	(.046)	(.043)	(.044)
Domstic LGBT+ Movement (logged)	.890***	.281	.242
	(.177)	(.173)	(.177)
LGBTQ MPs	.312***	.255***	.207***
	(.039)	(.031)	(.037)
Anti-LGBT+ Demonstrations	.421*	.189	.087
	(.201)	(.193)	(.192)
Protestant (%)	−.100**	−.095***	−.076**
	(.030)	(.027)	(.028)
Catholic (%)	−.081***	−.075***	−.067***
	(.024)	(.021)	(.020)
Muslim (%)	.049+	.016	.014
	(.027)	(.027)	(.026)
Population (logged)	−.826*	−3.422***	−3.158***
	(.321)	(.571)	(.554)
Trade	.005**	.002	.001
	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)
Democracy	−.046	−.059	−.063
	(.043)	(.039)	(.038)
Economic development	.784***	−.122	−.048
	(.206)	(.227)	(.214)
Constant	8.741+	58.923***	53.891***
	(4.805)	(10.022)	(9.723)
Observations	4,155	4,155	4,155
R-squared	.476	.540	.550
N countries	152	152	152

NOTE.—Robust SEs are in parentheses.
+ $P < .10$.
* $P < .05$.
** $P < .01$.
*** $P < .001$.

world society scholarship theorizing that as norms grow, this is associated with a generalized increase in country-level compliance and adoption of that norm. However, including a squared term acknowledges that the effects of the Global LGBT+ Context may not be linear. Indeed, the negative

coefficient for the squared term supports the hypothesis that the effect of the normative environment is diminishing over time ($b = -.002$, $P < .001$). This finding stands in firm contrast to some scholarship that presents norm adoption as inevitable or linear. As the diminishing returns occur, this raises important questions about the future potential of the global context alone in expanding progressive policies.

Figure 5 plots this effect. As can be seen, Global LGBT+ Context begins to plateau when it has a value of about 30, which occurs in the present case around 2013. Interestingly, this is the case despite exponential growth in this measure. This diminishment may be the result of increased activation by anti-LGBT+ actors. For example, during this period, there were significant pro-LGBT+ developments on the world stage, such as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's symbolic declaration, U.S. President Obama's formal support for same-sex marriage, and UK Prime Minister David Cameron's announcement at a Commonwealth of Heads of State meeting threatening to withhold foreign aid based on how recipients treat LGBT+ communities (Velasco 2020). These developments were met with strong condemnation. Moreover, given that the global average in 2013 on the policy index was only 2.1 out of 13, it is unlikely that a natural ceiling effect is taking place due to widespread success. Instead, I argue the plateau of the Global LGBT+ Context is evidence of anti-LGBT+ actors becoming more

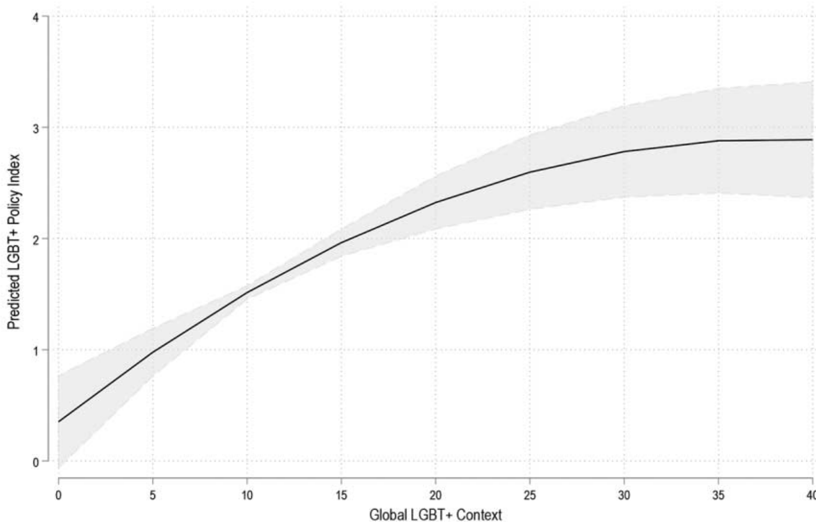

FIG. 5.—Effects of Global LGBT+ Context on LGBT+ Policy Index. All other predictors are held at their means.

successful in their ability to deinstitutionalize and diminish the norms' influence. This is discussed further below.

Model 4 includes the two network measures to test whether different channels of exposure are associated with higher or lower scores on the LGBT+ Policy Index. The positive association of Pro-LGBT+ Networks supports conventional arguments that greater exposure to the norm from sympathetic partners is associated with compliance—in this case, more progressive LGBT+ policies. A 1-SD increase in Pro-LGBT+ Networks is associated with about an increase of a third of a standard deviation, or 1 point, increase on the LGBT+ Policy Index. Anti-LGBT+ Networks are not associated with the index as initially theorized.

While the models in table 3 are helpful for evaluating the influence of my key variables on the dependent variable, the present modeling strategy does not take policy change into consideration. For that, I turn to the results from the multinomial models: table 4 shows the coefficients for the logged odds predicting the three different types of LGBT+ policy changes from 1990 to 2017. Starting with the Global LGBT+ Context, results again support the hypothesis advanced by neoinstitutional scholars that increasing support for LGBT+ rights in the normative environment will have a generalized effect of leading countries toward Compliance. The odds of Compliance increase by 1.09 (exp(.088)) for each unit increase in the Global LGBT+ Context. By including other types of policy changes, however, new insights are revealed. Besides increasing the odds of Compliance, increases in the Global LGBT+ Context are also associated with both Contestation ($b = .126$, $P < .01$) and Defiance ($b = .074$, $P < .10$). In other words, as LGBT+ norms become more salient, countries become more likely to adjust their policies in response—not just in the direction of Compliance. Furthermore, the squared term is negative and reaches significance only for Compliance and Contestation. The nonlinear association confirms and expands the finding from table 3 that the influence of the global context is diminishing. However, the squared term is not significant for Defiance. It appears that backlash against the norm may be occurring in a more linear fashion than compliance. This insight provides additional support for the suggestion that strengthening LGBT+ norms is activating a robust countermovement response. Indeed, figure 6 visually demonstrates these predicted probabilities. Though Compliance had greater probabilities when the norm was initially developing, today Defiance has the greatest predicted probability.

Next are the associations for the opposing transnational advocacy networks working in opposing ways to make LGBT+ norms salient within the domestic normative environment. Beginning with Compliance, Pro-LGBT+ Networks are marginally significant ($b = .260$, $P < .10$). This suggests that once the work of domestic LGBT+ actors is accounted for, transnational exposure is still influencing policy change. Meanwhile, Anti-LGBT+ Networks

TABLE 4
Multinomial Logistic Regressions Predicting LGBT+ Policy Change, 1990–2017

	Compliance	Contestation	Defiance
Global LGBT+ context	.088**	.126**	.074+
	(.032)	(.048)	(.038)
Global LGBT+ context squared	−.004***	−.005**	−.001
	(.001)	(.002)	(.001)
Pro-LGBT+ networks	.260+	.370	−.073
	(.153)	(.375)	(.250)
Anti-LGBT+ networks	−.055	.858**	.756**
	(.182)	(.296)	(.272)
Regional LGBT+ context	.124	−.964+	−1.353*
	(.196)	(.501)	(.637)
Domestic LGBT+ movement (logged)	.649***	−.156	−.177
	(.140)	(.322)	(.186)
LGBTQ MPs	−.114*	−.481+	−.129
	(.046)	(.250)	(.130)
Anti-LGBT+ demonstrations	−.100	.210	.346
	(.236)	(.498)	(.381)
Protestant (%)	−.002	.008	.014
	(.004)	(.013)	(.009)
Catholic (%)	−.008*	−.011	−.014+
	(.004)	(.009)	(.008)
Muslim (%)	.002	.010+	.009+
	(.004)	(.005)	(.005)
Population (logged)	−.214*	.032	.030
	(.091)	(.149)	(.127)
Trade as % of GDP	−.003+	−.006+	−.002
	(.002)	(.003)	(.003)
Democracy	.011	−.220**	−.172**
	(.042)	(.067)	(.063)
Economic development	.093	.087	.086
	(.081)	(.151)	(.128)
Constant	.633	−2.161	−2.800
	(1.842)	(3.187)	(2.457)
Observations	1,328	1,328	1,328
N of countries	152	152	152

Note.—Robust SEs are in parentheses. Status Quo serves as reference category.
+ $P < .10$.
* $P < .05$.
** $P < .01$.
*** $P < .001$.

are not, as theorized, significantly associated with compliance. The direction of influence on the coefficient does indicate, though, that these networks are working against expanding rights.

Moving to Contestation, only Anti-LGBT+ Networks are associated with greater odds of falling into this category, relative to the status quo. In other words, growing opposition networks is associated with unstable

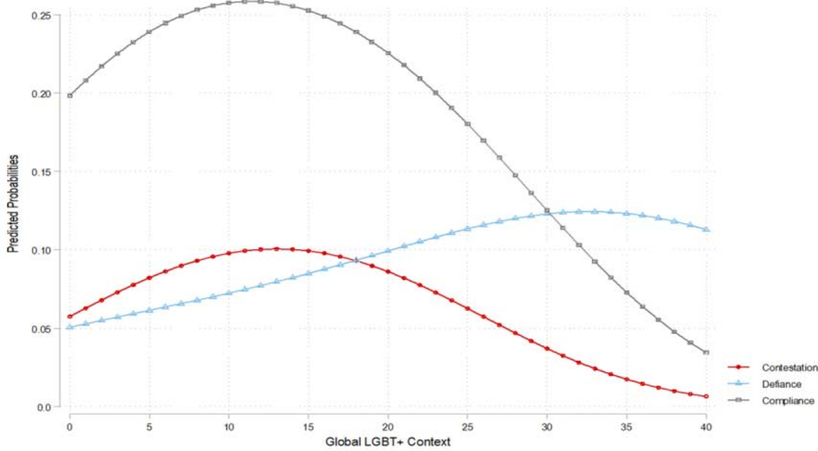

FIG. 6.—Effects on Global LGBT+ Context on Predicted Probability of Each Outcome. Status Quo is the reference category for each model. All other predictors are held constant at their means.

policy environments in which both expansion and contraction of rights can take place. This is not exactly consistent with the theorized associations presented in the 2 × 2 table in figure 3 which suggests that both network measures should be associated with contestation. Nevertheless, the direction of the coefficient for Pro-LGBT+ Networks is as theorized.

Finally, Defiance demonstrates inverse associations relative to Compliance. Greater integration into Pro-LGBT+ Networks is not significantly associated with policy backlashes, though the direction on the coefficient is in the theorized direction. Meanwhile, Anti-LGBT+ Networks are associated with a greater likelihood of backlash. In other words, greater integration within these opposition networks is associated with outright backlash against LGBT+ rights or, at least, a contested policy environment. These results largely support the typology presented in table 1.

Figure 7 shows the results of interest from the cross-lagged panel. As expected, figure 7 confirms that the direction of influence flows from the two network measures to the policy environment. Results also indicate there are no reciprocal effects, as the policy environment itself is not significantly associated with pro- or anti-LGBT+ networks at wave 2. In other words, the existence of more progressive policies in 1995 does not predict having greater ties to pro-LGBT+ networks in 2015. By testing reciprocal effects and accounting for where a country's policies begin, these results provide greater confidence in the findings in tables 3 and 4: embeddedness in different cultural environments via these networks shapes how countries will respond to growing calls to expand LGBT+ rights. Understanding that these networks

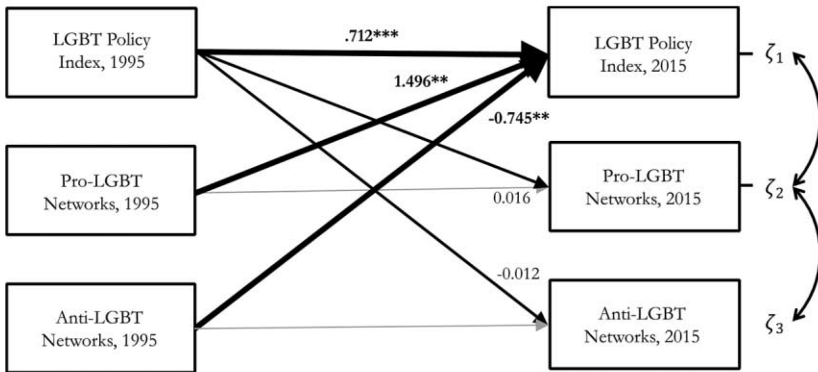

FIG. 7.—Cross-lagged panel model predicting reciprocal effects between LGBT+ Policy Index, Anti-LGBT+ Networks, and Pro-LGBT+ Networks. $N = 162$. Unstandardized coefficients presented. Paths between pro-LGBT+ networks and anti-LGBT+ networks are included within the model but are not shown in the diagram. Curved lines indicate correlated error terms. Control variables predict all outcomes at wave 2. Given the smaller sample size, a more parsimonious set of control variables are used compared to models in tables 3 and 4. These controls are Domestic LGBT+ Movement, LGBT+Q MPs, Anti-LGBT+ Demonstration, Religiosity, Trade, Economic Development, and Population.

are having meaningful influences on the policy environment now raises an important question for future research: Which factors determine why countries are differentially embedded within these networks to begin with, if not the policy environment itself?

AUXILIARY ANALYSES AND ROBUSTNESS

This project focuses on global and transnational processes to explain outcomes. Domestic factors, particularly around changing demographics, may also instigate anti-LGBT+ animus (Ayoub 2014; McKay and Angotti 2016; Angotti et al. 2019). As such, it is important to account for this alternative set of explanations beyond those included within primary models. In a series of auxiliary analyses, I iteratively test 11 additional domestic control variables by adding them to the full, final models in tables 3 and 4. These additional controls include: prevalence of HIV, funding from UNAIDS, net bilateral aid, ethnic fractionalization, indicator for year of national parliamentary elections, % urban, fertility rates, % immigrant, net migration, enrollment in tertiary education, and an indicator for LGBT+ NGO restrictions. Across analyses, primary findings and conclusions hold. In cases where some significance is reduced, this is due to missing patterns caused by the introduction of a new variable (see the online appendix).

The online appendix also includes three alternative model specifications to probe the robustness of results to different threats to inference. First, I

account for temporal dependency and endogeneity by incorporating lagged dependent variables through dynamic panel models using generalized method of moments (GMM; Arellano and Bond 1991). Second, I employ Allison and colleagues' maximum likelihood structural equation model approach to dynamic panel models to further account for reverse causality between the transnational networks and policy outcomes (Allison, Williams, Moral-Benito 2017). Third, I conduct two-way fixed effects to alternatively attend to the role of time given that Global LGBT+ Context correlates highly with time ($r = .96$; see fig. 4; de Chaisemartin and D'Haultfoeuille 2020). Main analyses privilege the Global LGBT+ Context over year covariates because this measure more substantively reflects the changes transpiring over time that theoretically matter (see also Hughes et al. 2015). Ultimately, these probes provide converging evidence that primary findings from this research are robust. The online appendix also includes additional models with alternative INGO measures, details on the construction of original measures and datasets, and descriptive statistics.

DISCUSSION

In this moment, it appears as though long-standing liberal norms within the global arena are being threatened: increasing democratic backslide, attacks on scientific authority and universities, and encroachment on human rights are coupled with rising populism, nationalism, and anti-immigrant sentiments. Why is this happening? Using the case of LGBT+ rights, this project seeks to shed light on this question by highlighting the rise of illiberal actors and their work to deinstitutionalize correlates of liberalism within the global arena. Below, I outline the study's key findings and contributions, limitations, and larger implications.

To understand the effects of illiberal actors, it is important to understand the conditions that led to their rise. The global LGBT+ rights movement followed a typical path demonstrated in world society scholarship: as LGBT+ norms develop and countries are exposed to them, this is associated with the expansion of rights and higher scores on the LGBT+ policy index. As such, the modification of nation-state behavior through domestic policy expansions help to further institutionalize the norm and demonstrate its legitimacy. These findings confirm previous scholarship highlighting how pro-LGBT+ norms are instrumental to explaining the cross-national diffusion in recent years (Ayoub 2015; Velasco 2018). Beginning in 2013, however, things started to change. The effect of the global context begins to wane in predicting the expansion of rights and changing rates of adoption. Why?

The success of pro-LGBT+ advocates within the international arena made opponents recognize they, too, needed to contest the global arena—resulting

in an illiberal, anti-LGBT+ countermovement (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Ayoub and Chetaille 2020). Over time, these actors co-opted the strategies which proved effective in advancing LGBT+ rights: engaging in “forum shopping,” lobbying international institutions, developing international conferences, investing in organizations and sympathetic politicians, issuing reports, and so on. Their ability to support and enable anti-LGBT+ efforts contributed to backlash and the contraction of LGBT+ rights around the world. These effects contributed toward the deinstitutionalization of LGBT+ rights, as well. The effect of global LGBT+ context fades over time because the success of anti-LGBT+ actors reduces the perceived legitimacy and appropriateness of the norm, therefore diminishing its socializing influence. Additionally, while probabilities of compliance are diminishing over time, probabilities of defiance are not—suggesting that, today, backlash may be more likely than the expansion of LGBT+ rights to diffuse because of transnational processes. These are the deinstitutionalization processes at play.

A paradox exists in how the international system, rooted in concepts such as liberalism, rationality, and universalism (Boli and Thomas 1999), facilitate the diffusion of illiberalism. It is unsurprising that anti-LGBT+ actors co-opted the language and form of the international space because they are products of it (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Schneiberg and Lounsbury 2008). This translates into not only how these actors organize (via NGOs, transnational advocacy networks, embedding international organizations) but also how they frame their opposition. Regardless of which specific frame is used, anti-LGBT+ actors strategically use established international human rights treaties and instruments (e.g., Universal Declaration, Rights of the Child, Universal Periodic Review) and rational, secular, scientific reasoning to validate and advance their claims. Interestingly, these actors are not, currently, seeking to broadly dismantle these institutions. Instead, they are leveraging them to advance an alternative normative agenda, or—at the very least—to buffer and weaken liberal ones. In playing by the “rules of the game,” these actors may, in fact, be further institutionalizing these macrostructures by lending them legitimacy. However, given that these institutions were built on liberal cultural foundations, can these trends continue, or will illiberalism’s rise necessarily diminish these global institutions as well?

These theoretical contributions were only made possible by careful attention to measurement and the incorporation of new data. First, this is one of the few studies to systematically document, measure, and analyze transnational anti-LGBT+ networks. One reason for this gap in the literature is because identifying such organizations is quite challenging due to their co-opting of liberalized discourses, which can mask anti-LGBT+ animus. This study makes an initial foray into resolving this measurement difficulty by tracking participation in anti-LGBT+ conferences and events or making clear anti-LGBT+ statements or actions. However, more research is needed

to develop better tools to identify who is part of these networks (anti-LGBT+ networks and illiberal networks more broadly), create more refined measures, and attend to how the characterization of a country's participation (via politicians, religious leaders, or civil society organizations) conditions these effects.

In identifying hundreds of illiberal INGOs, this research demonstrates that more nuanced measures of INGOs and exposure to the global arena are needed, as not all channels of exposure are the same (Velasco 2020). Across several world society studies, scholars use total INGO counts from the *Yearbook of International Organizations* to predict some type of outcome. This measure contributes to the assumption that all INGOs espouse liberal cultural beliefs and that any integration into the international community is productive toward liberal policy adoptions—which this research demonstrates is not the case (see also Hughes et al. 2015). Such approaches to measurement obscure the variation within INGOs and may misrepresent potential differential effects caused by increased illiberal INGOs. Furthermore, although common measures of world culture integration (e.g., internet usage, media consumption, urbanization, education levels, indexes of globalization) are often associated with liberalization, these macromeasures can similarly obscure illiberalism flowing through them (Winkler 2021). At minimum, then, scholars should acknowledge these (il)liberal divides when using these common measures.

Second, although it is not the primary focus of this study, I also develop a novel measure of domestic LGBT+ movements in each country. By amassing hundreds of resources, this new domestic measure of LGBT+ organizing explicitly isolates the effect of transnational networks, overcoming a limitation in previous scholarship. While such data collection efforts are onerous, they are a necessary step to have confidence in understanding how transnational movements are influencing domestic processes. These data can now serve the advancement of future research.

Third, this study develops a more nuanced instrument for identifying changes within the domestic policy landscape. Studies of cross-national policy adoption typically use a binary approach based on national adoption only, but this necessarily misses important subnational variation or that national policy environments can exist in contradiction. This project tries to advance this area of research by contributing a novel policy index that incorporates 18 different policies and five different indicators on the robustness and implementation of each policy. For example, as some states were adopting marriage equality in the United States, others were simultaneously implementing constitutional bans on them. Moreover, in 2015 the U.S. Supreme Court required all states to recognize same-sex marriages, but three years later, Donald Trump announced a ban on transgender troops in the military. The LGBT+ policy index captures both of these scenarios and allows

countries to exist in contradiction, which the single, binary policy indicator cannot capture. If illiberal movements continue to grow, it is likely that such policy contradictions will become more likely. Therefore, it is important to have instruments that can properly catch these dynamics.

While this research was able to provide novel insights, it is not without limitations. First, several intensive data collection efforts were needed to answer the present research question. Though several resources were consulted to construct measures around domestic LGBT+ movements, anti-LGBT+ demonstrations, transnational anti-LGBT+ networks, the LGBT+ policy index, and the global LGBT+ context, it is possible some data points, especially from smaller countries on the world stage, were missed. Although steps were taken to account for such possibilities, such as developing alternative measures or conducting robustness checks, it is nevertheless still important to provide the caveat that there is certainly some level of measurement error. Second, this project is specifically focused on changes in the global arena to understand domestic policy change. Therefore, other factors were not explicitly addressed. For example, though I test several possible internal factors, there are some that I am not able to measure across the full sample, such as religious nationalism or HIV prevalence (Ayoub 2014; Angotti et al. 2019). More data are needed to understand the degree to which such global-local interactions, revealed through qualitative studies, are generalizable. Third, while embeddedness within transnational networks is likely to be accompanied by material resources, this element is not explicitly measured. For example, U.S. evangelicals often funnel money to their counterparts, particularly in East Africa (Dreier 2018). Future research can add to our understanding of how these networks operate by highlighting how financial resources are flowing between these actors. Fourth, this research takes a transnational perspective and aims to identify cross-national patterns via a large-scale quantitative analysis. Such studies necessarily miss local nuance. Future research should continue to illuminate the mechanisms by which vernacularization operates through in-depth case studies and content analyses. Understanding discursive feedback loops between transnational and domestic actors, as well as how these influence the broader cultural content of world society, would advance this line of scholarship.

CONCLUSION

I conclude with two lessons from this research. First, in transnationalizing the issue, LGBT+ advocates made significant inroads within international bodies and across states. Now, however, LGBT+ rights are closely identified with the "international"—especially within Europe (Rahman 2014). In an era of rising populism and nationalism, intertwining LGBT+ rights with foreign interference becomes easier and puts anti-LGBT+ forces on

the side of populist energy. To counteract this, tactics need to change. Greater localization may be one effective strategy (Ayoub, Page, and Whitt 2021). This is a strategy already being undertaken by many in the Global South, where Indigenous histories of same-sex relationships are used to demonstrate that homophobia is the Western import—not homosexuality (Okoli and Halidu 2014; Tamale 2013). However, there must be caution as "homonationalism"—the incorporation of some gays and lesbians into nationalist or imperialist projects—has negative consequences (Puar 2018). Nevertheless, the finding that regional institutions buffer and mitigate against defiance is an indication that localization, even regionally, is a productive strategy and should be explored further (Gonsalves 2021).

Second, what does this mean for other norms moving forward? Because the "sacralization of the individual" marks a core cultural divide, illiberalism will continue to erode norms built on this cultural logic. Though LGBT+ rights are presently more susceptible to these forces due to weaker institutionalization, generally, there are indications that gender justice more broadly, as well as democracy, higher education, and the human rights regime itself, is *deinstitutionalizing*. For example, rising authoritarianism necessarily challenges liberal, democratic norms. Each instance of authoritarianism, like limiting judicial independence, inhibiting voting access, or criminalizing speech, weakens democratic practices within the global arena by legitimatizing such actions and creating models for diffusion and mimicry (Arsel, Adaman, and Saad-Filho 2021). Though a reaction may occur to strengthen liberal norms, the existence of the alternative means that the foundations of one are never secure so long as there are cultural actors (e.g., transnational networks) advocating for the other. Importantly, deinstitutionalization does not mean norms themselves are in peril as a socializing force. Quite to the contrary: culture, meaning, and symbolic boundary making are core features within this liberal versus illiberal divide. Normative logics will continue to shape politics (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Bromley et al. 2020). However, scholars may need to have more nuanced scope conditions to investigate when and how norms will influence particular actors (Wimmer 2021). The international community with whom actors identify with is changing. Depending on the strength of opposing actors, this fragmentation will increase symbolic boundaries between countries and further contribute to norm polarization.

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