



PLACING LETHAL AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS ON THE NATIONAL AGENDA

A case study into the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots



Radboud Universiteit

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Master thesis Human Geography: Conflict, Territories and Identities
Radboud University, Nijmegen

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September 2020

Executive summary

In 2012, different NGOs have initiated a new transnational advocacy network '*The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots*'. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is a global coalition of 164 international, regional and national NGOs in 65 countries. The campaign is concerned about the development of artificial intelligence in new methods of warfare. According to the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, lethal autonomous weapons are the third revolution in warfare and will fundamentally change how wars are fought. The aim of the campaign is to establish an international treaty and a national moratorium on the development, production and use of lethal autonomous weapons. In the past, transnational advocacy networks have successfully mobilized support for a ban on landmines, cluster munitions, blinding weapons and nuclear weapons. In the last years, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots has been able to raise attention for the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. The United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (UNCCW) first discussed the issue in 2013. Afterwards, the issue is also discussed in various national parliaments.

The academic literature has mainly focused on how transnational advocacy networks can exercise influence on the international level. The role of NGOs as domestic actors has been underemphasized. Theories such as the boomerang model (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) and the spiral model (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999) describe how NGOs use transnational advocacy networks to bring domestic change. However, these theories have portrayed the NGO-state relation as a conflictive relation, where domestic advocacy group directly condemn state practices. These models start from the assumption that a repressive state is unwilling to listen to the demands of domestic NGOs. Less attention has been paid to how NGOs function within a transnational advocacy network to influence states' interests in democratic states. In particular, this research has focused on the first phase of the policy-cycle, the agenda-setting phase. This is an important phase as agenda-setting processes determine which issues are taken up for decision-making. Joachim (2007) provides a theoretical framework to explain how women's organisations have been able to place the issues of violence against women and reproductive rights and health on the agenda of the United Nations. The theory of Joachim cannot explain how NGOs are able to place an issue on the national agenda. Therefore, this research will give an answer to the following research question: *How, why and under what conditions are the members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots able to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agenda?*

A qualitative research design is used to give an answer to this research question. This study is an in-depth case study into the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. In particular, this case study is a phenomenological case study, as it attempts to describe how the phenomenon is experienced by the participants. By using the method of process-tracing, this research aims to uncover the intervening processes between the independent and the dependent variable. This research has adapted the theoretical framework of Joachim (2007) to apply the theory to the domestic context. The starting point of this study is an existing theory which is applied to the case of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. Additionally, this study seeks to add some new insights to the theory of Joachim. The data for this research is collected through document analysis and semi-structured interviews with seven employees from NGOs that are members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. These NGOs are Article 36 (United Kingdom), Italian Network for Disarmament (Italy), Facing Finance (Germany), Mines Action (Canada), Norwegian Peace Association (Norway), PAX (Netherlands) and Pax Christi Flanders (Belgium).

The theoretical framework of Joachim (2007) includes three variables: framing, political opportunity structure and mobilizing structures. The conditions from the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures have been modified to apply the conditions to the case study into the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots. Framing is the central element in the theoretical framework of Joachim. According to Joachim (2007), NGOs are able to raise attention for an issue by *framing* it in a strategic way. People will think about an issue in a particular way depending on how the issue is presented. Three types of framing processes can be distinguished: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing and motivational framing. In the diagnostic framing process, an explanation is given for the existence of a problem. Prognostic framing offers solutions for the problem. Finally, motivational framing aims to mobilize people to take action. Studies about the campaigns against landmines, cluster munitions and nuclear weapons provide examples about the framing processes.

Although framing processes are important, they are not sufficient to explain the agenda-setting power of NGOs. Dependent on the presence of the conditions of the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures, the frames will become accepted. The *political opportunity structure* consists out of three elements: access, influential allies and political alignments and conflicts. The first condition is the *access* to institutions that NGOs seek to influence. In order to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapon on the national agenda, the NGOs will attempt to get access to the national parliaments. Therefore, the NGOs will establish relations with political parties, members of parliament, civil servants, diplomats and parliamentary committees. The assumption of this research is that NGOs are only able to obtain access when they are seen as legitimate actors. The second condition of the political opportunity structure includes *influential allies*. Allies are important as they can amplify and legitimize the frames of NGOs because they have resources that the NGOs lack themselves. Joachim distinguishes four types of allies: foundations, media, individual states and UN secretariats. None of these actors will play a role in the domestic agenda-setting process. Therefore, the concept of high-key individuals of Rutherford (2000) is used. The third condition of the political opportunity structure is the *political alignments and conflicts*. This thesis assumes that changes in the political alignments and conflicts exist through elections or conflicts between political parties. This provides opportunities for NGOs as it may bring political parties into power who support the ideas from the NGOs.

According to Joachim, *mobilizing structures* consist out of three elements: organisational entrepreneurs, heterogeneous international constituency and testimonial and scientific knowledge. *Entrepreneurs* are individuals or organisations that are willing to promote the issue from the start. To gain acceptance for their ideas, NGOs need to prove the existence of a particular problem or the feasibility of a solution. Therefore, NGOs use *scientific expertise and testimonial knowledge*. The condition of organisation entrepreneurs and scientific and testimonial knowledge can also be used in the national agenda-setting process. The condition of *heterogeneous constituency* has been modified to *diverse membership*, which means that an NGO has members from diverse cultural and political background or that an NGO claims that they represent people from diverse cultural and political backgrounds. This can enhance the legitimacy of a frame as an NGO can claim that they represent not only the interests of a particular group in the society.

This thesis assumes that the conditions of the conceptual model could be identified in the case study. Regarding framing, this study describes the three framing processes. In the diagnostic framing process, the findings from this study show that NGOs were able to identify the problem by framing lethal autonomous weapons as a humanitarian issue, instead of a military or security issue. The NGOs

focused on the potential consequences for civilians that these weapons may cause. The strategy of framing the issue of lethal autonomous weapons as a humanitarian problem appeared to be helpful in countering the arguments calling for a positive obligation to ensure meaningful human control. In the prognostic phase, the NGO argued that the ultimate solution for the problem is an international treaty and a national moratorium on the development, production and use of lethal autonomous weapons. In order to motivate people to take action, NGOs have tried to raise feelings of fears in the process of motivational framing. A crucial element in this frame, is the use of the term 'Killer Robots'. Additionally, by using the frame of public support for a ban autonomous weapons, the NGOs are trying to place the issue on the political agenda by showing that it is already an issue on the public agenda. Furthermore, NGOs argue that states can enhance their reputation by showing leadership on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. In this frame, the NGOs refer to previous campaigns against conventional weapons.

Whether these frames become accepted and legitimized is dependent on the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures. Considering the political opportunity structure, the study assumed that NGOs gain access if they are seen as legitimate actors. According to the NGOs, legitimacy is derived from working in alliances and functioning as an expert. Furthermore, NGOs are seen as trustworthy actors because of their actions in the past. This study has identified four allies: scientists, technological companies, religious organisations and well-known public figures. These allies have legitimized the frames as they were seen as objective and neutral actors or as moral actors. The allies also provided access opportunities for the NGOs, for example by including NGOs as stakeholders in governmental advisory reports and parliamentary hearings. Perceptions about the condition of political alignments and conflicts in parliament were diverse. Some NGOs argued that elections created opportunities for NGOs while others argued that it could also have a negative effect. Considering the first condition of the mobilizing structures, the study identified two entrepreneurs: scientists and the steering committee of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, in particular Human Rights Watch. The condition of diverse membership is not identified in this case study. It is surprising that the issue of lethal autonomous weapons was so easily adopted in the organisations. The case of lethal autonomous weapons reveals a puzzling outcome regarding the condition of testimonial knowledge. In previous campaigns, this has been a crucial condition but in this campaign, victims are lacking as an actor. In the absence of testimonial knowledge, scientific knowledge has become an important condition.

Only the conditions of diverse membership and testimonial knowledge have not been identified in this study. This study confirms the explanatory power of the theoretical model of Joachim and broadens the scope of this theory. In particular, this study argues that two elements were crucial in the agenda-setting process. First, the role of scientists as entrepreneurs and allies. Scientists are seen as objective and neutral. The support from scientists has provided opportunities for access and improved the legitimacy of the NGOs. In addition, the embeddedness of the campaign in a long history of disarmament activism has been pivotal. In general, this study confirms the assumption that NGOs can simultaneously function as domestic and international actors. In this way, NGOs have claimed a role in the debate about lethal autonomous weapons

Preface

This thesis is written as a completion of the master's program Conflict, Territories and Identities at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. This thesis is also the symbolic end of my academic career. In the past five years, I have learned so much and I look back on many experiences on an academic and personal level.

The idea for this research started when I applied for an internship at PAX in the Public Affairs team. This internship gave me the opportunity to combine my bachelor's in political science with my master's in conflict studies. The result is a research into the agenda-setting power of NGOs. In particular I have focused on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons, which I find a really interesting topic. Lethal autonomous weapons are seen as the third revolution in warfare and I am really curious how the developments in artificial intelligence will change the world.

This research is written during a time when the world experienced a pandemic. Most of the time writing this thesis, I was alone in my student apartment. However, without others I would not have been able to write this thesis and therefore I would like to thank a few people. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisors Martin van der Velde and Ainul Fajri for the skype sessions and the feedback they have given. Although they were not experts on the topic I have chosen, they provided me with useful feedback and suggestions. I also want to thank Hugo and Gytha, my supervisors from PAX. Within four months, I became a part of the organisation. I really enjoyed working in this inspiring environment. Despite working from home, I learned a lot and I got interested in the field of public affairs.

For my research I conducted seven interviews. Thanks to Merel, Francesco, Erin, Elizabeth, Maaïke, Lene and Johanna for your time and giving insight in your advocacy work. Also, thanks to Jutta Joachim for your advice about applying your theoretical model to my case study.

Further one, I would like to thank my fellow students who became friends. Thanks to Johan, Marga and Robert for your endless support.

Nanda van der Sloot

September, 2020

List of abbreviations

CMC – Cluster Munitions Coalition

GGE – Governmental Group of Experts

ICAN – International Campaign for the Abolishment of Nuclear Weapons

ICBL – International Campaign to Ban Landmines

NGO – Nongovernmental organisation

TAN – Transnational Advocacy Network

UN – United Nations

UNCCW - United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons

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1. An introduction to transnational advocacy networks, NGOs and agenda-setting

1.1 The influence of transnational advocacy networks

“Clearly, one can no longer relegate NGOs to simple advisory roles. They are part of the way decisions are made” – (Lloyd Axworthy, cited in Simmons, 1998, p. 89).

With this statement during the non-governmental organisation (NGO) forum on landmines, the Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy acknowledged the ability of NGOs to engage in humanitarian disarmament negotiations. In the last years, a number of transnational advocacy networks have been established to ban certain (un)conventional weapons (Carpenter, 2011). Today’s dominant model of disarmament activism is a coalition among established NGOs that lobby states to create international treaties (Feinstein and de Waal, 2015). In 2017, the International Coalition for the Abolishment of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) received the Nobel Prize for its efforts to create an agreement on the prohibition of nuclear weapons (BBC, 2017). Other successful examples are the International Campaign to Ban the Landmines (ICBL) and the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC). These campaigns have generated mass support and resulted in binding treaties. On the other side, transnational advocacy networks have voiced their concerns about small arms and non-lethal weapons such as acoustic weapons, but this has not resulted in successful treaty processes. According to O’Dwyer (2006), these campaigns are still at the stage of norm emergence (ibid., p. 81). Whether or not the concerns from the NGOs will become accepted by states depends on the ability of NGOs to convince states from their viewpoints. NGOs are not able to exercise hard power in terms of military or economic sanctions, but their influence relies on the ability to persuade states (O’Dwyer, 2006, p. 81). According to Joachim (2007), the influence of an NGO is the greatest in the agenda-setting phase (ibid., p. 16).

In 2012, different NGOs have initiated a new transnational advocacy network ‘*The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots*’. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is a global coalition of 164 international, regional and national NGOs in 65 countries (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, n.d.). The arguments against lethal autonomous weapons¹ can be distinguished into three categories: legal, ethical and security concerns. The coalition argues that lethal autonomous weapons should be restricted or banned because they would violate fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, for example the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants and the principle of proportionality (Ekelhof, 2017). Furthermore, the coalition argues that it is unethical to use lethal autonomous weapons. They argue that the decision of human life should not be reduced to an algorithm (Ekelhof and Struyk, 2014). Regarding security, the coalition fears that once developed, lethal autonomous weapons will become available for non-state actors as these weapons are relatively cheap to produce. According to the coalition the development of lethal autonomous weapons could lead to an increase in conflicts as this type of weapon could lower the threshold to go to war. The idea behind this argument is that it may be easier to use lethal force when there are fewer risks for soldiers (ibid.).

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots has been able to raise attention for this issue and placed lethal autonomous weapons on the international agenda. In 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on

¹ The definition and the terminology of autonomous weapons is a highly debated issue. The transnational advocacy networks and the NGOs use the term ‘Killer Robots’. For the purpose of this research, the more neutral term of lethal autonomous weapons will be used.

extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns, promptly presented a report on lethal autonomous robots to the Human Rights Council. Heyns defines lethal autonomous weapons as ‘weapons that once activated, can select and engage without further human intervention’. According to Heyns, lethal autonomous would violate human dignity and therefore recommends states to establish national moratoria (Heyns, 2013). The issue has now been on the agenda of the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (UNCCW) for seven years (Ekelhof, 2017). Besides the attention at the Human Rights Council and the UNCCW, lethal autonomous weapons have also been on the national agenda. In the Netherlands, the parliamentary committee of defence invited for instance several experts for a round-table talk about the issue of drones and lethal autonomous weapons (Tweede Kamer, 2019). Norway’s Christian Democratic Party asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs what the government does to develop a legal framework in order to ensure meaningful human control (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, 2018). The Belgian parliament even adopted a resolution that calls on the Belgian government to “forbid the Belgian military from using lethal autonomous weapons and to work towards an international treaty” (PAX, 2018).

1.2 Research question

Academic literature and media attention have mainly focused on how transnational advocacy networks can exercise influence on the international level. In the case of lethal autonomous weapons, most attention is given to the CCW meetings. It remains unclear how NGOs conduct a national campaign. Nowadays, NGOs play prominent roles in the transnational advocacy networks. However, the role of NGOs as simultaneously domestic and international actors has been underemphasized (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 6). Therefore, this research will explain how the members of a transnational advocacy network, NGOs, are able to influence the state’s interest at the national level. In particular this research will focus on the first phase of the policy-cycle, the agenda-setting phase. The aim of this research is to examine the agenda-setting power of NGOs. NGOs can be involved in the entire policy-cycle, but this study focusses on the agenda-setting power as the influence of an NGO is the greatest in the agenda formation (Joachim, 2007). The agenda-setting formation deals with the question which issues receive attention. Although agenda-setting is less effective, especially when it is compared to for example decision-making, it is nevertheless relevant as agenda-setting processes determine which issues are taken up for decision making (Princen, 2007, p. 21). For this thesis, only the ability of NGOs to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agenda is examined, regardless of the decision to ban lethal autonomous weapons. It is most suitable to study the agenda-setting phase, as the issue of lethal autonomous weapons is a relatively new debate and some countries have for instance not yet developed policies about this type of weapon. Joachim (2007) has provided a theoretical framework to explain how women’s organisations have succeeded in placing the issues of violence against women and reproductive rights and health on UN agendas. The theory of Joachim explains how NGOs are able to place issues on the agenda of the UN, but the theory cannot explain how NGOs place an issue on the national agenda. The research objective of this study is to explain the national agenda-setting power of NGOs in the case of the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots. This leads to the following research question:

Why, how and under which conditions are the members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots able to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agendas?

In order to formulate an answer to the main research question, the following sub-questions are formulated:

1. *What are lethal autonomous weapons and how can the debates about lethal autonomous weapons be explained?*
2. *Who are the members the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots and why do they want to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agenda?*
3. *How can the agenda-setting power of the members of the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots be explained?*
4. *Under which conditions are the members of the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots able to use their agenda-setting power?*

1.3 Scientific relevance

The academic literature has mainly focused on how transnational advocacy networks can exercise influence on the international level, for example by influencing the agendas or negotiations of intergovernmental organisations. For instance, Betsill and Corell (2001) have developed a theoretical framework about how transnational advocacy networks influence negotiations about international environmental agreements. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), the role of NGOs as domestic actors has been underemphasized. This thesis will therefore contribute to the academic literature as it will focus on the domestic role of NGOs within a transnational advocacy network. Existing literature has focused on examining how NGOs mobilize the international institutions or are looking at the interactions of the domestic and international levels (Joachim, 2007, p. 183). Considering the latter, theories such as the boomerang model (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) and the spiral model of human rights change (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999) have particularly been interested in how national NGOs use international support to bring domestic change, for example with respect to human rights. However, these theories have portrayed the NGO-state relation as a conflictive relation, where domestic advocacy group directly condemn state practices. These models start from the assumption that a repressive state is unwilling to listen to the demands of domestic NGOs. Less attention has been paid to how NGOs function within a transnational advocacy campaign to bring domestic change in democratic states. The theory of Joachim explains the agenda-setting power regarding the UN agenda, but cannot explain how NGOs influence the national agenda. This thesis is scientific relevant as it will provide an alternative framework that explains how NGOs are able to place an issue on the national agenda. To provide an alternative model, the conditions mentioned by Joachim are modified to the domestic context and insights from other theories have been added to the model. An unique element of this research is that instead of measuring influence from an outsider's perspective, this thesis uses the perceptions of NGOs to give an answer to the research question.

Most research about the influence of transnational advocacy networks has focused on environmental issues (Betsil and Correll, 2001). There exists a theoretical gap about the influence of these actors in other policy areas than environment. This thesis will therefore contribute to the academic literature as it focusses on the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is established in 2013 and is therefore a relatively new transnational advocacy network. Little academic research exists about this specific transnational advocacy network. A research about this new transnational advocacy network dealing with a new type of weapon is therefore relevant.

1.4 Societal relevance

This thesis is societally relevant as it will provide useful information for the members of transnational advocacy networks to improve their campaigns and become more successful. According to the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots, lethal autonomous weapons would violate fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. A successful campaign is socially relevant as the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots argues that a binding regulation will protect the society against the treat of lethal autonomous weapons.

In particular, this research might be interesting for NGOs that have not been able to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agenda or for NGOs active in states where the issue will be reconsidered. This is for example the case in the Netherlands where the official statement on lethal autonomous weapons be will renewed in 2020. In the official statement of 2015, the Dutch government argued that lethal autonomous weapons might play a role in the future and the development of these types of weapons is necessary to guarantee a technological high-end military (AIV, 2015). This official statement is based on an advisory report by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) and the Advisory Committee on Issues of Public International Law (CAVV). According to the AIV and the CAVV there are various practical objections to a moratorium or a ban. Much of the relevant technology is being developed for peaceful purposes in the civilian sector and has both civilians and military applications. It is therefore difficult to draw a clear distinction between permitted and prohibited technologies (AIV, 2015, p. 53). The AIV and the CAV advised the government to review the relevance of the report in five years' time. The development of a new statement in 2020 provides an opportunity for the NGO to have influence on how lethal autonomous weapons are defined and how the concept of meaningful human control is understood by the Dutch government. The Netherlands is not the only state where governments are discussing their official statements and developing policies about lethal autonomous weapons. Thus, this thesis might also be interesting for NGOs similar to PAX.

In this thesis, I focus on the Coalition to Stop Killer Robots but the insights of this research might also be useful for other transnational advocacy networks in the field of disarmament such as the campaign to regulate small arms (O'Dwyer, 2006). Until now the transnational civil society has mainly focused on lethal weapons, such as landmines, nuclear weapons and cluster munitions. The insights from this study might also be interesting for campaigns around non-lethal weapons such as acoustic weapons that cause health problems as they produce extremely low or high frequencies. Carpenter (2011) argues that there are types of weapons that have gone uncondemned by transnational advocacy networks. For instance, thermobaric weapons, which are able to make fireballs and kill through burning and psychotropic weapons, which are able to diffuse mood-altering aerosols, have been unnoticed by the existing campaigns (*ibid.*, p. 70). This study might therefore also provide insights for advocacy groups that aim to initiate a new transnational advocacy network. This study could even be relevant for transnational advocacy networks dealing with other issues than humanitarian disarmament, such as the Campaign to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (Carpenter, 2007).

1.5 Structure

This introduction is followed by a chapter about lethal autonomous weapons. This chapter describes the development of lethal autonomous weapons, the debates around this development and the concerns of NGOs. The third chapter is the theoretical framework in which the key concepts are defined. Furthermore, the theoretical framework will explain why existing theories cannot explain

national agenda-setting in democratic states. The theory of Joachim (2007) is described and applied to the domestic context. In the methodology chapter, the techniques I used are explained, which shows how the data is gathered. Furthermore, this chapter describes the case selection and mentions the limitations and biases of this study. After the methodology, the findings from the interviews and the document analysis are presented. In the conclusion a short review of the research is provided and the research questions are answered. Lastly, this chapter will mention limitations of this study and will propose some suggestions for further research and will give practical considerations.

2. Lethal autonomous weapons: the third revolution in warfare?

Lethal autonomous weapons have become a highly debated topic. This section will briefly describe the developments in methods of warfare, the debates around the development of lethal autonomous weapons and the concerns from NGOs. Furthermore, a comparison will be made with other conventional weapons².

2.1 Weapon innovation

The continuous development of new methods of warfare has always been a central element of warfare. The idea behind the development of new methods is that enemies can be overwhelmed with new and unexpected technologies (Von Heinegg et al., 2018 p. 1). The development of new military technologies has fundamentally changed how wars are fought. Historically, combatting parties used weapons that were designed for hand-to-hand combat. Over time weapons with an increasing range and firepower were developed and as a consequence, combat became less of a contest between individuals and increasingly a conflict between weapons systems (van den Boogaard, 2015). Since the beginning of the computer age, the speed of this trend accelerated. Van den Boogaard argues that as a result, “the enemy has become a dot on a computer screen instead of a human being” (ibid., p. 250). The first development of autonomy in weapon systems can be traced back to the second World War. During the second World War, the Kettering Bug, a tiny unmanned torpedo, was developed (Ekelhof, 2017, p. 312). Since the first developments of military robots during the second World War, a transition has taken place from remotely controlled robots to more autonomous systems, primarily in the air. During the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq drones played for instance an important role. The drones were not merely surveillance vehicles but were equipped with arms (van den Boogaard, 2015). Drones were much cheaper than manned aerial vehicles and could also be used in far more dangerous missions, as the pilot is located far away from the drone’s operating area (ibid., p. 254). According to Gregory (2011), the use of drones can be explained by the focus on targeting individual actors. Conflicts are increasingly fought for a cause, for example for a religion, instead of for a country. As a result, the enemy can be everywhere. Therefore, the military aims to destabilize terrorist networks by the elimination of individuals. A new kind of enemy is fought and this requires a different approach. The use of drones fits into this new approach.

The next step in weapon innovation is the development of lethal autonomous weapon systems. Lethal autonomous weapons have been described as “the third revolution in warfare, after gunpowder and nuclear arms” (Ekelhof, 2017, p. 313). There is no international consensus about the definition and the existence of lethal autonomous weapons. Human Rights Watch divided three categories to distinguish different types of weapons on the amount of human involvement. The first category is human-in-the-loop, “weapons that can select targets and deliver force only with a human command” (Human Rights Watch, 2012, p. 2). The second category is the man-on-the-loop, “weapons that can select targets and deliver force under the oversight of a human operator who can override the robot’s actions” (ibid.). And the last category: human-out-of-the-loop, “weapons that are capable of selecting targets and delivering force without human input or interaction” (ibid.). Lethal autonomous weapons would fall within the last category.

² This issue of lethal autonomous weapons is a highly complex and technical issue. This chapter will stick to a basic explanation and will focus on the societal consequences.

Since 2013, lethal autonomous weapons have been discussed within the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). Since 1980, the parties to the CCW discussed a number of conventional weapons, such as landmines, cluster munitions and blinding weapons (Ekelhof, 2017). In the CCW, definitions and terminology are of prime concern. The Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) of the CCW attempts to formulate a shared definition to make a debate about the regulation of lethal autonomous weapons possible. Related to the debates about the definitions, are the debates about the actual existence of these weapons. Some states argue that lethal autonomous weapons do not yet exist. The United States argued during a CCW meeting:

“We want to be clear that we are here to talk about future weapons, therefore we are not referring to remotely piloted aircraft, which as their name implies are not autonomous weapon or other existing weapons systems” (cited in Ekelhof, 2017 p. 320).

On the other side, some states and scholars argue that already a few weapon systems have the characteristics of a lethal autonomous weapon system. Klare (2019) refers to the US Phalanx gun system that can fire autonomously when a ship is attacked. Another example is mentioned by Ekelhof (2017) who refers to the Israeli Guardium, an unmanned ground vehicle which is able to autonomously react on unplanned events (ibid., p. 312). According to the Israeli Defence Force (2012), the Guardium is “one of the most important weapons on its border with Gaza”.



Image 1: The Israeli Guardium, a semi-autonomous weapon (Israel Defense Forces, 2012).

2.2 Arguments against lethal autonomous weapons

The trend towards more autonomy in weapons has worried many people because of the legal and ethical concerns. These worries have resulted into calls for an international treaty and national laws prohibiting the development, production and use of these weapons. The international coalition argues that lethal autonomous weapons should be restricted or banned because they would violate

fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, for example the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants and the principle of proportionality (Ekelhof, 2017). According to Sharkey (2019), lethal autonomous weapons lack essential components to fulfil the requirements of the principle of distinction. Although lethal autonomous weapons would be able to identify humans, they would not be able to make a distinction between combatants and non-combatants, or other immune actors such as wounded combatants or those who have surrendered (ibid., p. 76). Sharkey (2019) argues that the principle of proportionality is also beyond the capabilities of present and near future autonomous weapon systems. She argues that lethal autonomous weapons are not able to make decisions about military advantage and military necessity as these weapons cannot fulfil the requirements of situational awareness (ibid.). Sparrow (2007) fears that lethal autonomous weapons do not meet the just war principle that someone can be held responsible for deaths. According to Van den Boogaard (2015), there is a need to attribute criminal responsibility to a human being, when targeting decisions have resulted in casualties. Others have voiced concerns that lethal autonomous weapons would be a threat for international peace and security (Beenes et al., 2019). Lethal autonomous weapons might for instance be able to increase the speed of decision-making, which might lead to conflict escalation. Lethal autonomous weapons might trigger a global arms race where they will become mass produced and become accessible for non-state actors such as terrorists.

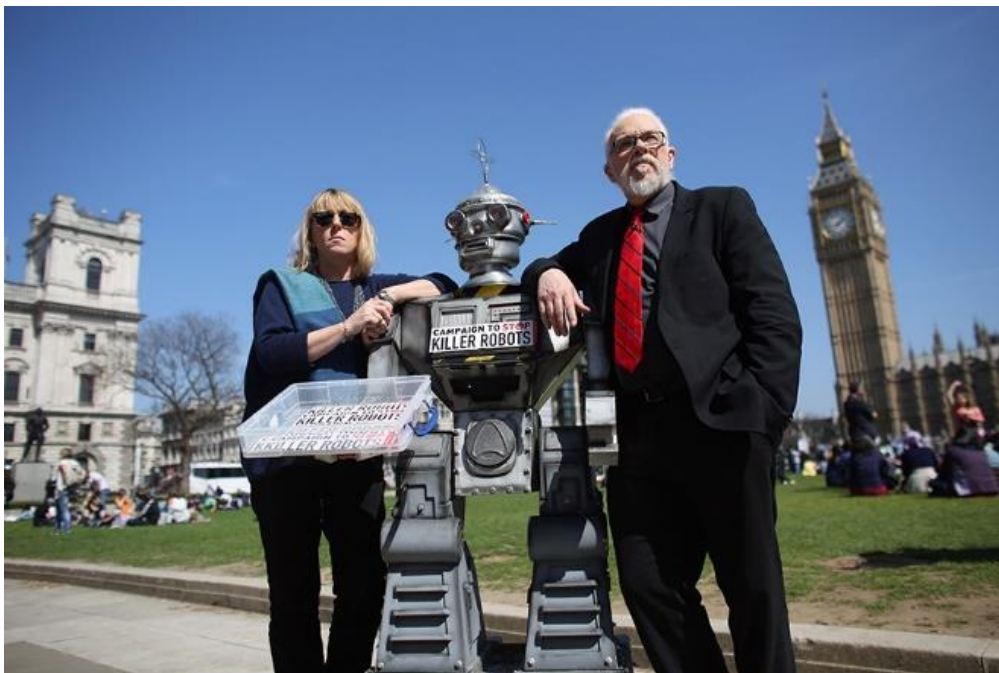


Image 2: Jody Williams and Noel Sharkey calling for a ban on lethal autonomous weapons in the United Kingdom at April 23, 2013 (Photo: Oli Scarff/Getty Images, obtained from Klare, 2019)

2.3 Advantages

One of the reasons for the debates about lethal autonomous weapons, it that a number of states stressed that there could also be advantages in deploying lethal autonomous weapons.

“There may be key military advantages to autonomous weapon systems, as long as there is meaningful human control in the wider loop of the decision-making process. For example, computers often respond faster and more accurately than humans, which may reduce the risk to friendly units and the civilian population. These systems are often also able to operate in environments that are dangerous to

humans, or difficult to reach" - (Answer by email from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands in response to written questions from PAX, cited in Denk and Kayser, 2017).

Proponents of lethal autonomous weapons argue that emerging technologies could make war more precise and could reduce casualties among civilians and combatants. This would be relevant for states as there is a political trend of societal intolerance for civilian casualties (Ekelhof, 2017). According to Von Heinig et al. (2018), unmanned warfare has become increasingly attractive for democratic states. Every dead soldier brought home can reduce the support for the ruling party. Coker (2001) describes how Western societies concentrate increasingly on reducing exposure to danger. Historically, serving the nation as a soldier was seen as a civic duty. Nowadays, links with the nation state are weakened or gone and states do not longer wage war because of their principles, but for example to reduce the chance of terrorist attacks. Lethal autonomous weapons make unmanned warfare possible, which seems to be an attractive solution to protect soldiers (Von Heinig, 2018). Other advantages of deploying lethal autonomous weapons are for example that these weapons are able to collect and process data faster than humans. Furthermore, lethal autonomous weapons could operate in environments where humans cannot survive, for example due to high pressure, extreme temperatures or lack of oxygen (AIV, 2015). Lethal autonomous weapons would not be concerned about their own safety as they are not affected by emotions such as fear or hatred. Finally, lethal autonomous weapons may provide greater transparency than human soldiers, as they could be equipped with cameras and would not be motivated to conceal information (ICRC, 2014, p. 22). In addition to the technical and practical advantages, financial considerations need to be considered. The development of lethal autonomous weapons also contributes to cost savings, due to reduced manpower, production and maintenance costs (Von Heinig et al., 2018).

2.4 Compared to other types of weapons

The debate about lethal autonomous weapons can be compared with other debates about conventional weapons. Ekelhof (2017) argues that lethal autonomous weapons are most comparable to landmines. It could be said that, once activated, both landmines and lethal autonomous weapons function without further human intervention. According to Carpenter (2011), both types of weapons cannot make a distinction between combatants and civilians. In political terms, lethal autonomous weapons are most comparable to blinding lasers, as they are both perceived as a new technology. Blinding lasers are an example of a weapon that was pre-emptively banned. The debate about a ban on blinding lasers started when Sweden made the argument that the use of this weapon would lead to unnecessary suffering and should therefore be unlawful under customary law (Ekelhof, 2017, p. 317). Before this weapon could be produced and deployed, laser weapons that are specifically designed to cause permanent blindness were banned in 1996 in the CCW fourth Protocol. Ekelhof (2017) argues that the difference between discussing blinding laser weapons and lethal autonomous weapons is that "it is easier to understand the potential consequences of laser weapons that causes permanent blindness than the potential consequences of lethal autonomous weapons that may cause all kinds of effects" (ibid., p. 318). Lethal autonomous weapons are often compared to unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), also called drones. According to Ekelhof, functions such as autonomous navigation, take-off and landing are less controversial and even considered generally acceptable. Ekelhof (2017) states that unmanned aerial vehicles can have autonomous capabilities but are not considered as lethal autonomous weapons (ibid.). Although the most advanced systems can perform autonomous functions, the current use of unmanned systems retains a human in the decision-making

function regarding the use of lethal force. Van den Boogaard (2015) argues that the main difference between lethal autonomous weapons and other type of weapons is the use of artificial technology, which gives lethal autonomous weapons systems the capability to select a target and engage that target without human interference.

3. Theoretical framework: national agenda-setting power of NGOs

In order to provide insight in how, why and under what conditions the members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots able to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agenda, this chapter will give an overview of the academic literature. First, the chapter will define the concepts of transnational advocacy networks and NGOs. Afterwards, this chapter will discuss theories that explain the role of NGOs within transnational advocacy networks. Finally, this chapter will focus on agenda-setting and will provide and will apply the theory to the national level.

3.1 Transnational advocacy networks

During the Cold War norms about disarmament were created by the great powers in the world (Petrova, 2019). The end of the Cold War has opened new opportunities for NGO mobilization. Since the 1990s, transnational advocacy networks emerged in the field of humanitarian disarmament. Prominent examples are the Campaign to Ban the Landmines, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and the Cluster Munition Coalition. Transnational advocacy networks have become an increasingly significant phenomenon in today's globalized world (Hanegraaf et al., 2015). Keck and Sikkink (1998) define transnational advocacy networks as "a network that includes those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse and dense exchanges of information and services" (ibid., p. 2). According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), the goal of transnational advocacy networks is to change the behaviour of states and international organisations. Keck and Sikkink (1998) distinguish four strategies that explain how transnational advocacy networks seek influence. The first strategy is information politics, this means that the transnational advocacy network is able to collect politically usable information and move it to where it will have the most impact (ibid.). With the second strategy, symbolic politics, the transnational advocacy network use symbols, action or stories to make sense of a situation. The next strategy is leverage politics, in which powerful actors are asked to use their power to affect the situation in another state. The last strategy is the accountability politics, which is the ability of the network to hold actors to their commitments. A transnational campaign may use different strategies simultaneously (ibid.).

3.2 Members of the transnational advocacy network: NGOs

According to Keck and Sikkink (1995), domestic NGOs play a prominent role in transnational advocacy networks. Transnational advocacy networks emerge when NGOs mobilize beyond their national borders. The term NGO has become a commonly accepted definition within the academic world, but there is little consensus about what the term actually means (Davies, 2019). NGOs are often defined as non-state, non-profit and non-violent organisations (ibid.). The most important attribute in the definition of NGOs is the exclusion of governmental components. According to Martens (2002), NGOs may receive funding from governmental actors but only to a limited extent. Besides public sources, NGOs may receive funding from charitable contributions. The attribute of non-profit seeks to draw a line between NGOs and other non-state actors such as companies. NGOs often have been described as voluntary organisations. In the last years, NGOs have been professionalised which means that these organisations are runned by employed staff instead of volunteers (Mercer, 2002, p.6). Another attribute is the non-violent character of an NGO, which distinguishes NGOs from groups that use force to achieve their aims. In this way, terrorists and national guerrilla movements are excluded from the definition (Martens, 2002). According to Vedder (2007) NGOs must be distinguished from activist groups. NGOs are typically organized according to a more or less stable structure. NGOs have some

stability and can be addressed from outside; this is not the case with activist groups. Sometimes, the attribute of non-political is added. This implies that NGOs are not interested in seeking governmental power and therefore political parties are excluded from the definition. Vedder (2007) distinguish two categories of NGOs: operational and advocacy. Operational functions of an NGO include designing or implementing concrete actions, for instance health care or food aid. Advocacy functions of NGOs are aimed at influencing the opinions, policies and practices of national and international governmental authorities and the general public. There is a debate whether the term NGO refers to an international or a national actor. For some, an international NGO might refer to an organisation with members in more than one country while others require that an organisation operates in different countries (Martens, 2002). Calnan (2008) argues that there is an inevitable degree of overlap between international and national NGOs. However, Calnan argues that an NGO is domestic if “the problems it addresses, its office and its members all derive from a single country” (2008, p. 7). This is regardless of whether the NGO is active internationally or whether it received funding from foreign donors.

3.3 NGOs within transnational advocacy networks

It is clear that NGOs do not have the same kind of power that states have. In contrast to states, NGOs are not sovereign actors and therefore legally not the equals of states (Ahmed and Potter, 2006, p. 14). NGOs cannot make laws or sign international treaties. They are observers rather than full members of international governmental organisations. NGOs are not able to exercise hard power in terms of military or economic sanctions (O’Dwyer, 2006, p. 81). This raises the question what kind of power NGOs actually have. The theory of constructivism is able to explain the influence of NGOs. This theory argues that interests, identities and roles are socially defined. This also means that national interests are not fixed and can be changed (Ahmed and Potter, 2006, p. 13). The power of NGOs relies on their ability to convince states from their viewpoints (O’Dwyer, 2006, p. 81).

Various authors have paid attention to the role of NGOs in transnational advocacy networks. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), transnational advocacy networks appear most likely to emerge around issues where the relation between domestic groups, for example an NGO, and their government is blocked. When this happens, the international arena may be the only means that domestic activists have to gain attention for their issues. The boomerang model (illustrated in figure 1) is developed by Keck and Sikkink (1998) and describes how NGOs use their network to have an influence on the domestic state. The authors argue that when a national NGO is blocked from accessing its own government, the NGO will search for international allies. The NGO will search for an NGO in a state where there are more opportunities for NGO advocacy. The NGO in state A will give information to the NGO in state B where the government is more supportive (ibid., p. 12). State B will put pressure on state A or a third organisation, like an intergovernmental organisation, to bring pressure on state A (ibid., p. 13). In this way, the NGO in state A tries to bring pressure on its own government from outside.

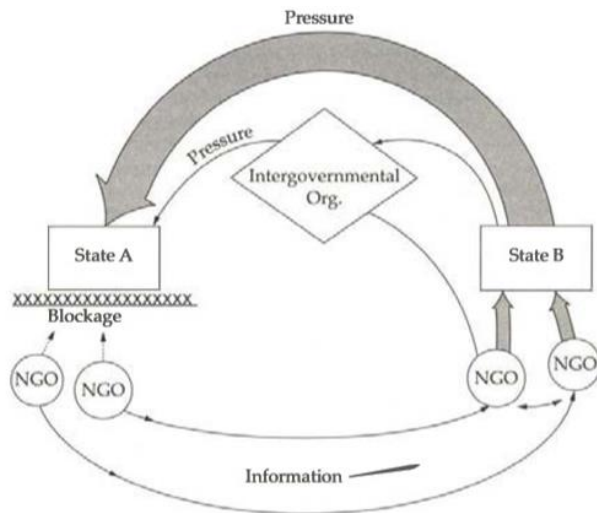


Figure 1: The boomerang model (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 13).

Another theory is the spiral model of human rights change by Risse, Ropp and Sikkink (1999), presented in figure 2. The spiral model is built upon the boomerang model. The spiral model attempts to come up with a more specified conceptualization of the causal relations between states and non-state actors. The spiral model is developed to explain the variation in the extent to which states have internalized norms. The spiral model refers to domestic opposition groups, which can be interpreted as NGOs. The spiral model consists out of five phases. The first phase is the initial state of repression on behalf of the state. Norm-violating states enact policies of repression while at the same time domestic opposition groups try to bring attention to the issue. In this phase, the domestic opposition groups are “too weak to challenge the dominant views, beliefs and norms by the state” (Risse, Ropp & Sikkink, 1999, p. 20). If the domestic opposition groups are able to inform the transnational advocacy network, the issue can be put on the international agenda, moving to the second phase. The transnational networks will receive information from the domestic actors and will therefore be able to accuse the repressive regime. The transnational network is able to mobilize international organisations and liberal states to push the repressive state. If this international pressure holds on, a state will move to the next phase and will make tactical concessions to get the international human rights community “off their backs” (ibid., p. 25). In the fourth stage, the prescriptive status, the state accepts the international norm. This means that a state for instance will sign an international treaty (ibid.). In the last phase, the rule consistent behaviour, a state has complied with the new norm.

The spiral model has been criticized by various scholars. For example, Shor (2008) argued that the model underestimates the importance of the role of domestic politics. Muñoz (2009) states that domestic politics, apart from the pressure exerted by national human rights activists, is not included as a relevant factor in the model (ibid., p. 45). In the boomerang model of Keck and Sikkink (1998) and the spiral model of Risse, Ropp and Sikkink (1999), the NGO-state relation is portrayed as a conflictive relation, where domestic advocacy groups directly condemn state practices. These models start from the assumption that a repressive state is unwilling to listen to the demands of domestic NGOs. Risse, Ropp and Sikkink (1998) recognise that the spiral model was developed and applied only to states with authoritarian and repressive regimes. Stroup (2019) argues that the actual NGO-state relations are quite varied. Stroup uses four categories to describe state-NGO relations: conflict, cooperation,

competition, and co-optation. The boomerang and the spiral model are examples of a conflictive relationship (ibid., p. 34). These models are not able to describe the influence of transnational advocacy networks in democratic states. The variety of NGO-state relations supposes that there exist alternative models to explain the influence of NGOs on state's interests.

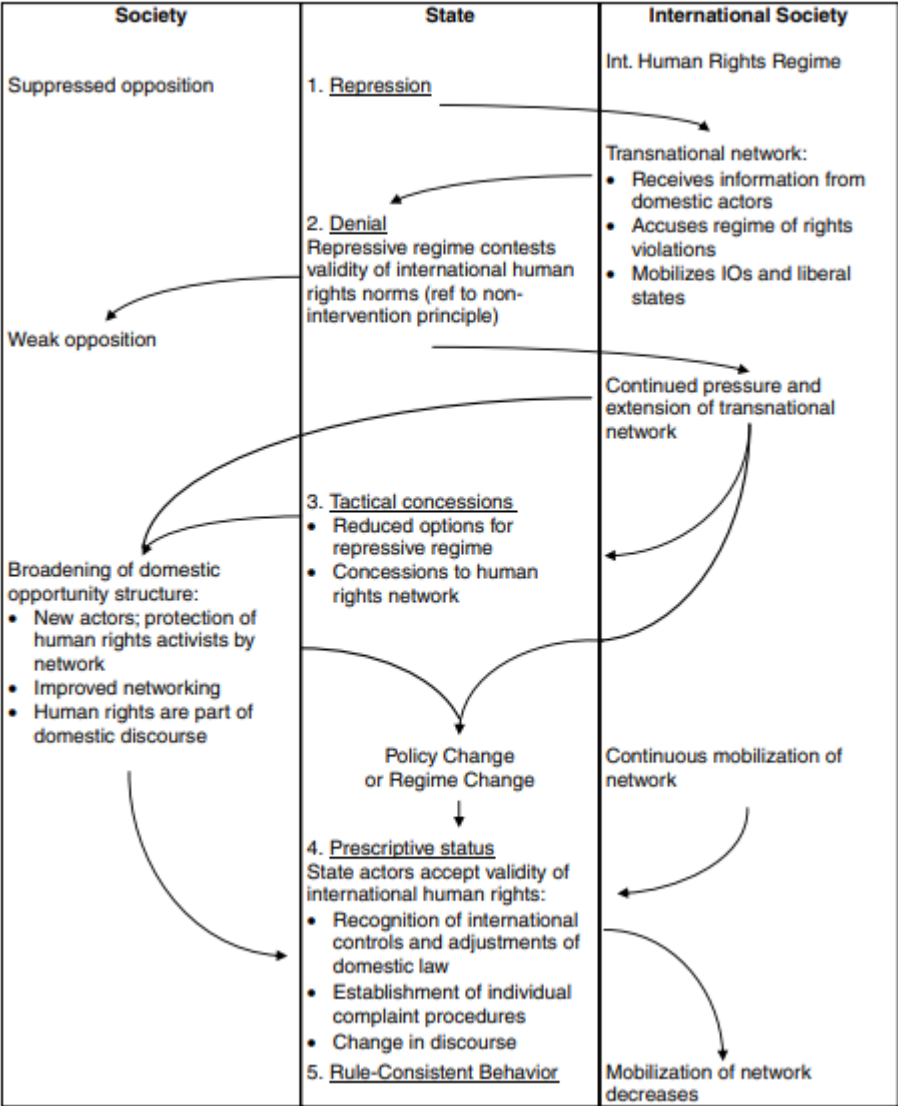


Figure 2: The Spiral Model (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999, p. 20)

3.4 Policy-cycle: agenda-setting

The policy cycle can be used to study the influence of NGOs in democratic states. Howlett, Ramesh and Perl (2009) describe the five-stages of a policy process: agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation and policy evaluation. The first step, the agenda-setting phase, is concerned with the question which issues receive attention. The next step is the decision-making phase which is concerned with how the policy is made. The third step focusses on the implementation of the policy. In the fourth step the policy is evaluated, which might lead to lessons to change the policy, the learning phase (ibid., p. 13). Joachim (2007) argues that of the various phases in the policy cycle, the influence of an NGO is the greatest in the agenda formation. Although agenda-setting is less effective when it is compared to decision-making, it is nevertheless relevant because agenda-setting processes determine which issues are taken up for decision making.

Princen (2007) defines the agenda as “the set of issues that are seriously considered in a policy” (ibid., p. 28). Agendas are therefore about the attention given to issues. A distinction is made between three types of agendas in democracies: the media, the public and the political agenda. The media agenda refers to those issues appearing in the media. The public agenda includes the set of issues considered by the general public. The political agenda contains the set of issues considered by official policymakers. For the purpose of this thesis, only the political agenda is taken into account (ibid., p. 29). The process of agenda-setting is highly political and competitive as various actors ask for attention for their issue. According to Princen, agenda-setting is “a matter of degree, rather than a matter of simply being on or off the agenda” (ibid., p. 28).

3.5 Theoretical framework of Joachim

Joachim (2007) provides a theoretical framework to explain how, why and under what conditions women’s organisations have been able to place the issues of violence against women and reproductive rights and health on UN agendas. According to Joachim (2007), NGOs are able to persuade states by framing issues in a strategic way. Whether these frames become accepted is dependent on the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures. In figure 3, the theoretical framework is graphically represented. The next paragraphs will discuss the theory of Joachim. Insights from other theories will be added to the theory of Joachim.

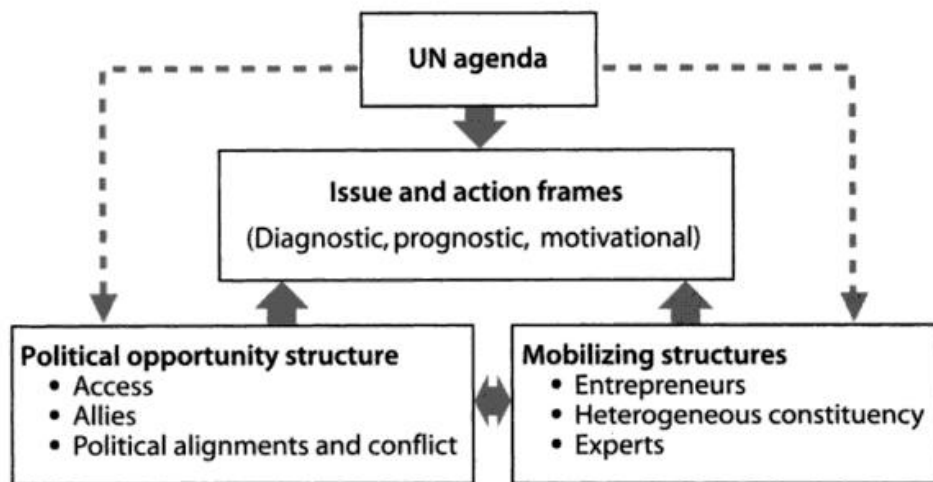


Figure 3: Theoretical framework (Joachim, 2007, p. 40).

3.5.1 Framing

Framing is the central element in the theoretical framework of Joachim. Framing is used by NGOs to gain governmental attention for their concerns. A frame provides a perspective from which a problem can be made sense of and acted upon (Joachim, 2007, p. 19). Rutherford (2007) defines framing as “the selection of elements within a particular issue” (ibid., p. 78). People will think about an issue in a particular way depending on how that issue is presented. Frames introduced by NGOs frequently contradict and compete with the frames of other actors (Joachim, 2003, p. 251). Therefore, NGOs continually create new frames that challenge the existing ones (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 613). The challenge for NGOs become to align their frame in such a way that it the audience understand the

message (Rosert and Sauer, 2020). The concept of frames shows that NGOs are actively engaged in the construction of meaning (Joachim, 2007, p. 19). Corell and Betsill (2001) argue that NGOs can do this by shaping the jargon that is used by policy-makers. In the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, environmental NGOs used the term “hot air” to refer to the ability of states whose greenhouse gas emissions were below its legally binding limits to trade the difference (ibid., p. 97). Establishing jargon and shaping the language that is used is a way for NGOs to influence how various issues and proposals are perceived.

Benford and Snow (2000) distinguish three types of framing processes: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing and motivational framing (ibid., p. 615). Diagnostic framing involves “the identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality”. In order to mobilize people, the first step is that people see a condition as unacceptable and are willing to take action. (Joachim, 2007, p. 20). In order to identify a problem, NGOs often choose strategically between different frames. For example, the global campaign to stop the use of child soldiers had two frames to describe the problem of child recruitment. NGOs have chosen to treat it as a humanitarian issue rather than as a child labor issue (Carpenter, 2007, p. 104). Rutherford (2000) and O’Dwyer (2006) argue that NGOs were able to place the issue of landmines on the international agenda by framing landmines as a humanitarian problem (ibid., p. 76). Prior to the campaign, landmines have been used for many years and were seen as legitimate weapons due to their defensive functions. The landmine issue needed to be shifted away from the national security context, as this was traditionally regarded as an area exclusive for states (O’Dwyer, 2006, p. 84). This fits into the trend of shifting the emphasis from state security to the security of individuals. Landmines were no longer seen as legitimate protectors of state borders, but rather as a threat for civilians (Rosert and Sauer, 2020, p. 10). According to Bolton and Nash (2010), the strategy of using the frame of a humanitarian problem was also used in the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC). The CMC asked for concrete examples that illustrated the military utility of cluster munitions. In the absence of concrete examples, the NGOs gathered evidence of the humanitarian harms caused by cluster munitions (ibid., p. 180). Changing the issue category also helped NGOs to increase attention towards the issue (Rutherford, 2007, p. 110). Furthermore, changing the issue category helped to include non-traditional actors into the policy-making process, such as humanitarian and religious groups.

According to Keck and Sikkink (1998) campaigns against practices involving bodily integrity and prevention of bodily harm for vulnerable or innocent groups are most likely to be effective transnationally (ibid., p. 28). Carpenter (2005) argues that the protection of civilians as an international issue has been framed in such a way as to reproduce the idea that women and children (but not adult men) are innocent and vulnerable. Carpenter argues that it is easier to mobilize support for an issue when the message is framed in terms of protecting women and children. Given the pre-existing cultural assumptions about the innocence and vulnerability of women and children this framing strategy makes sense (ibid., p. 327). O’Dwyer (2006) gives an example from the case of landmine campaign. In the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), images of women and children were frequently used to show that landmines were killing civilians rather than combatants. In reality, 60% to 70% of the landmine’s victims were men. According to O’Dwyer, “new norms which seek to protect innocents from bodily harm have been identified as among the easiest to popularise, so this was an effective framing strategy for the ICBL to adopt” (ibid., p. 84). In this way, the issue of landmines could be framed as an apolitical and humanitarian issue instead of a national security issue.

Framing typically includes counterframing, in which the problems, solutions and strategies proposed by opponents are discredited (Benford and Snow, 2002, p. 617). The strategy of framing the issue of landmines as a humanitarian problem appeared to be helpful in countering anti-ban arguments that landmines were a legitimate weapon under international humanitarian law (Rutherford, 2000). Opponents of prohibition argued that irresponsible use, rather than the weapon itself, was the problem. They argued that regulation of landmines would be a solution (O'Dwyer, 2006, p. 85). The ICBL was mainly based on images and personal stories from victims. Anti-ban states made military and political arguments why landmines should not be banned but at the time they recognized the humanitarian suffering and expressed their concerns. This strategy resulted in incoherent policies that were not compatible with how and why landmine issue was put on the international agenda (Rutherford, 2000).

The second type of framing is prognostic framing. Prognostic framing involves "the identification of solutions to a problem" (Joachim, 2007, p. 20). In this phase, the NGOs propose solutions and strategies to solve the problem that was identified in the first framing process (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 616). As an example, Joachim refers to legal instruments such as international treaties or declarations (2007, p. 20). An example of prognostic framing is given by Carpenter (2007) and Rutherford (2000). These actors argue that an explanation for issue emergence is the extent to which advocates can link new norms to pre-existing moral standards. According to Carpenter (2007), "the promotion of new standards is most likely to succeed if these can be grafted onto pre-existing taboos" (ibid., p. 104). NGOs mobilized support for a ban on chemical weapons as this campaign was grafted onto a previous ban on the use of poisons in warfare. In the ICBL, issue of landmines was framed as illegal under current international humanitarian law. NGOs used already established principles in humanitarian law, such as the principle of proportionality and distinction between combatants and civilians. The International Committee for the Red Cross argued that "some weapons should be prohibited both by customary and treaty based international humanitarian law because landmines cause superfluous injury and unnecessary suffering (damaging effects disproportionate to the military purpose) and that they are of an indiscriminate nature (no distinction between civilians and combatants)" (Rutherford, 2000, p. 81).

According to Joachim (2007), motivational framing "provides a reason for why people should take action with respect to a particular issue" (ibid., p. 21). Motivational framing goes beyond diagnostic and prognostic framing as it aims to mobilize people (Benford and Snow, 2002, p. 617). Motives can be defined in moral or normative terms but can also refer to already-existing international norms and standards. Motivational frames can also be used to describe what happens if action is not taken. NGOs working for nuclear disarmament for instance used to refer to doomsday possibilities of nuclear confrontation (Joachim, 2007, p. 23). The belief and perceptions of NGOs about the identified problems and solutions are frequently in conflict with the beliefs and perceptions of the actors that NGOs want to mobilize (Joachim, 2007, p. 22). In these cases, NGOs have to engage in 'frame alignment'. In frame extension, a particular form of frame alignment, the boundaries of a frame are enlarged to include a broader perspective and interests. Whether the frames of NGOs become accepted and legitimized is dependent on the dynamic interactions of two conditions: the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures. The next paragraphs will describe these two conditions.

3.5.2 Political opportunity structure

According to Joachim, the political opportunity structure refers to “*broader institutional context that provides opportunities for or imposes constraints on NGOs engaged in framing processes*” (2007, p. 23). The author has identified three variables: access to institutions, influential allies and political alignments or conflict. First, the framing efforts of NGOs are dependent on gaining *access* to the institutions they seek to influence (ibid., p. 24). As an example, Joachim refers to international meetings such as UN conferences which provide opportunities for lobbying and interactions. Accreditation enhances the ability of NGOs to exert influence. Accreditation at the UN gives NGOs the opportunity to attend UN meeting and conferences. Furthermore, it allows NGOs to make oral and written statement and obtain UN documents (ibid., p. 25). Betsill and Corell (2001) argue that relying on access as evidence of influence can be misleading. NGOs are often denied access to negotiations or they are only allowed to participate as observers. The increasingly frequency of closed meetings means that NGOs need to rely on indirect or informal relationship with state-delegates (ibid., p. 70). The second condition discusses the importance of *influential allies*. Influential allies can amplify and legitimize the frames of NGOs because they have resources that non-state actors themselves lack. Joachim (2007) distinguishes four types of actors: foundations, media, individual states and UN secretariats (ibid., p. 27). First, the financial support from charitable foundations has contributed to growth and visibility of NGOs. Second, in contrast to NGOs, the media is able to research a broad public and raise public awareness for an issue. Joachim also refers to UN secretariats as allies, as these institutions prepare the UN meetings and conferences and therefore rely on information from NGOs. Finally, individual states are identified as allies. UN member states can for instance support NGOs by introducing a resolution that is drafted by an NGO (ibid., p. 28). In addition to access and influential allies, changes in *political alignments and conflicts* can create opportunities for NGOs. This could for instance be the case as changes in political alignments may bring into power actors who support the frame from NGOs (ibid., p. 30). A frame from a NGOs can function as a bridge between conflicting parties. Joachim gives the example of a conflict between two political blocs at the United Nations Conference on Environmental and Development (ibid., p. 31). NGOs were able to bring a compromise by introducing the concept of ‘sustainable development’ because it combined the preferences of both parties, economic development and environmental protection.

3.5.3 Mobilizing structures

The presence of the conditions of the political opportunity structure are by themselves not sufficient to mobilize support for the frames. This is dependent on the mobilizing structures which NGOs have available, to which we now turn. According to Joachim (2007), mobilizing structures consist out of three conditions: organisational entrepreneurs, heterogeneous international constituency and experts. *Organisation entrepreneurs* are “individuals or organisations who care enough about an issue to absorb the initial costs of mobilizing, bring with them a wealth of organizing experiences and are well connected” (ibid., p. 33). According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), entrepreneurs who become the entrepreneurs for a new campaign have often gained experiences in previous campaigns (ibid., p. 14). Specific states are willing to act as entrepreneurs because it provides states the opportunity to enhance their image or to take a leadership role. This was for example the case in Canada’s leadership on the Ottawa Treaty to ban landmines (Gwozdecky and Sinclair, 2001). The second condition, *heterogeneous international constituency*, means that an international campaign consists out of members from diverse cultural and political backgrounds. This can enhance the legitimacy of a frame “by making it more difficult for opponents to discredit it as representing only the interests of certain groups”

(Joachim, 2003, p. 252). Finally, NGOs need different forms of expertise to be able to create frames. The condition can be distinguished into two elements: scientific expertise and testimonial knowledge. To gain acceptance for their ideas, NGOs need to prove the existence of a particular problem or the feasibility of a solution (ibid., 2003, p. 36). Scientific knowledge is regarded as a credible and reliable source and it is presumed to be objective and neutral. According to Rutherford (2000), NGOs used statistics about landmine victims to get states to recognize the landmine problem. The statistics showed that “landmines kill and maim more than twenty-six thousand people per year of whom an estimated 80% are civilian” (ibid., p. 87). In contrast to scientific knowledge, testimonial knowledge is derived from personal experiences and circumstances. In the case of landmines, NGOs used pictures and personal stories of victims to mobilize support. The landmine victim stories were used as a moral argument to condemn landmines and opponents for a ban. Governmental policymakers were hesitant to state their opposition to a ban as a result of the strong support from the media and the public opinion about landmine use. In addition, testimonial knowledge can enhance the legitimacy of the diagnostic frames. Testimonial knowledge is effective as it makes individuals aware that “the problem they are faced with is far-reaching and systematic rather than incidental and exceptional” (Joachim, 2007, p. 37). Victim stories can also promote prognostic frames, in which solutions for the problem are proposed. When personal experiences are taken into account in the proposal of solutions, the solutions will face less resistance. However, victim stories are sometimes questioned as they are not neutral and could be exaggerated. Therefore, NGOs often combine the strategy of using testimonial knowledge and scientific knowledge, as the latter is often seen as an objective and neutral source (ibid.).

3.6 Relations between the variables

Joachim (2007) argues that changes in the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures are important, but they are not sufficient. Only the interactions between these variables make it possible that frames become accepted and legitimized. Therefore, the relation between political opportunity structure, mobilizing structures and framing processes has to be explained. The first relation is the interaction between the political opportunity structure and the process of framing. The political opportunity structure creates possibilities for NGOs to frame issues (ibid., p. 38). Access to institutions gives NGOs for instance the opportunity for “exchange, interactions and lobbying” (ibid.). Influential allies provide resources that NGOs lack. Influential allies can for example provide access to institutions or enhance the legitimacy of NGOs. Changes in the political alignments may be advantageous for NGOs as it brings into power groups who share the ideas and beliefs of the NGOs. The second relation is between framing and mobilizing structures. Before changes in the political opportunity structure can be effective, they need to be identified as changes. Therefore, organisation entrepreneurs are needed “who are willing to absorb the initial costs of mobilizing” (ibid., p. 39). The entrepreneurs can give NGOs the credibility and legitimacy to act and formulate solutions. The third relation exist between the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures. Increased access to political institutions gives NGOs more procedural knowledge. When an NGO obtains information about the internal processes of an institution, an NGO will become more strategic in creating frames. Furthermore, through the mobilizing structures, NGOs are able to bring changes in the political opportunity structure. Entrepreneurs have connections that can be used to help NGOs to gain access to institutions or to gather the support of influential allies. There is also an interconnectedness between the conditions within one variable, an example is the connection between allies and access. When NGOs obtain access to institutions, this may result into the loss of

the independent position of an NGO. Therefore, influential allies can function as intermediaries between the institution and the NGO. In this way, NGOs gain access but retain their oppositional character (Joachim, 2007, p. 26).

3.7 Applied to the domestic context

The theoretical framework of Joachim (2007) is focused on the ability of NGOs to place the issues of violence against women and reproductive rights and health on UN agendas. The theory of Joachim provides useful insights but has to be modified to explain how NGOs place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agenda. In figure 4, the conceptual model for this study is presented. For the purpose of this case study, the choice has been made to focus on three causal mechanisms in the model. First, there is a relation between the political opportunity structure and the framing processes. Second, a relation exists between the mobilizing structures and the framing processes. And finally, this study focusses on the interactions between the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structure. The original model assumes that the agenda has an impact on the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures. This relation will not be discussed in this research. The most central element of the conceptual model, framing, can also be used to explain national agenda-setting. The condition of the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures have to be applied to the domestic context. In order to do this, some insights from other theories will be added to the theory of Joachim.

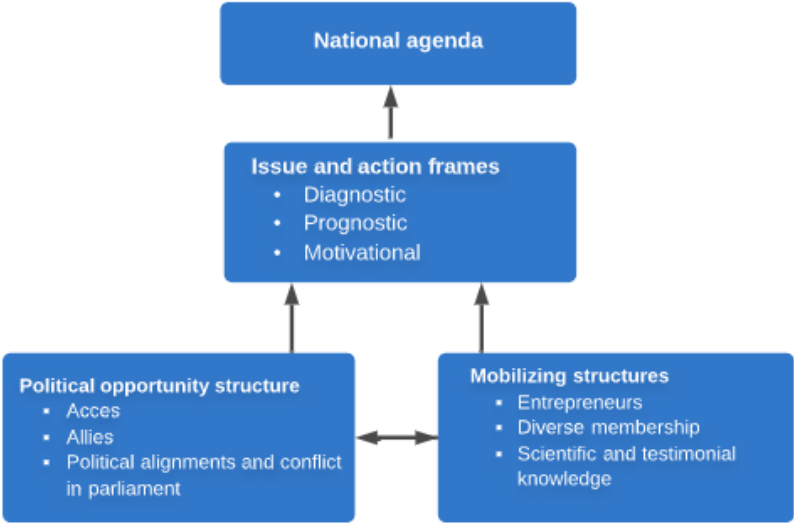


Figure 4: Conceptual model (Author’s own work based on theoretical model by Joachim, 2007, p. 40)

The *political opportunity structure* consists out of three elements: access, influential allies and political alignments and conflicts. The first condition is the *access* to institutions that NGOs seek to influence. In order to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapon the national agenda, the NGOs will attempt to get access to the national parliaments. Therefore, the NGOs will establish relations with political parties, members of parliament, civil servants, diplomats and parliamentary committees. The assumption of this research is that NGOs are only able to obtain access when they are seen as legitimate actors. Chapman and Fisher (2000) and Hudson (2001) argue that NGOs can claim legitimacy

for their advocacy on a variety of bases. NGOs can for instance seek to influence policy by pointing to practical experience on the ground (Chapman and Fisher, 2000, p. 163). Second, NGOs promote a particular value that is widely recognised within society and or enshrined in international law. Third, NGOs act as experts on a particular issue. According to Chapman and Fisher (2000), this works well when there is consensus on a topic or when NGOs have credible allies. Another reason for legitimacy is working in alliances and networks, in which the NGOs gain legitimacy from the other members of the network. In addition, networks provide NGOs already available mechanisms for diffusing information, for example by using mailing lists from former campaigns (Joachim, 2007, p. 33). Hudson (2002) argues that history is also seen as a source of legitimacy (ibid., p. 337). Although Hudson argues that claims based on history might sound simplistic, it does play role in affecting which organisations are taken seriously. Other reasons for legitimacy are based on internal characteristics of the organisation, such as democratic membership structures.

The second condition of the political opportunity structure includes *influential allies*. Allies are important as they can amplify and legitimize the frames of NGOs because they have resources that the NGOs lack themselves. Joachim distinguishes four types of allies: foundations, media, UN secretariats and individual states. None of these actors will play a role in the domestic agenda-setting process. However, also in the domestic context allies can play an important role in raising attention for an issue. Rutherford (2000) mentions the importance of the support of 'high-profile individuals'. He refers to the influence of Princess Diana in putting landmines on the national agenda in the United Kingdom (ibid., p. 77). The United Kingdom was one of the strongest opponents of a ban on landmines. However, with the attention from Princess Diana, the landmine policy changed in just a few months. Princess Diana visited Angola as a guest of the British Red Cross. After her visit, the issue gained much more publicity and she called on the British government to ban landmines (ibid., p. 100).

The third condition of the political opportunity structure is the *political alignments and conflicts*. In the conclusion of the study of Joachim (2007), she argues that NGOs "benefit not only from changes taking place at the international level but also from those at the domestic level" (ibid., p. 180). Therefore, this condition focusses on political alignments and conflicts in the national parliament. Changes in the political alignments and conflicts exist through elections or conflicts between political parties. Elections may bring political parties into power who support the ideas from NGOs. When political parties disagree with each other, a frame from a NGO can be used to bridge the differences. The Labor Party in the United Kingdom made the issue of landmines one of its election campaign goals. After the elections, when Tony Blair was elected as prime minister, the government announced the support for a ban on landmines (Rutherford, 2000, p. 101).

According to Joachim *mobilizing structures* consist out of three elements: organisational entrepreneurs, heterogeneous international constituency and testimonial and scientific knowledge. Joachim defines *entrepreneurs* as "individuals or organisations who care enough about an issue to absorb the initial costs of mobilizing" (ibid., p. 33). To gain acceptance for their ideas, NGOs need to prove the existence of a particular problem or the feasibility of a solution. Therefore, NGOs use *scientific expertise and testimonial* knowledge (ibid., 2003, p. 36). The condition of organisation entrepreneurs and scientific and testimonial knowledge can also be used in the national agenda-setting process.

The condition of heterogeneous constituency on the contrary has to be modified. In the theory of Joachim, *heterogeneous constituency* means that “constituencies vary in their composition, depending on cultural, political, ethnic and socioeconomic background of their members” (Joachim, 2007, p. 34). In this thesis, heterogeneous constituency will mean that an NGO has members from diverse cultural and political background or that an NGO claims that they represent people from diverse cultural and political backgrounds. This can enhance the legitimacy of a frame as the NGO can claim that they represent not only the interests of a particular group in the society (Joachim, 2003, p. 252). Therefore, this condition will be reformulated to diverse membership. This research assumes that there has been debate amongst the members or within the organisation to become active on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons.

4. An in-depth case study

The theoretical framework described in the previous chapter gives a comprehensive overview of the existing theories. This chapter will describe which methods are used to answer the research question. Furthermore, this section will explain how the members of the transnational advocacy campaign are selected and how the data is collected. Finally, this section will reflect on the limitations of the research design.

4.1 Method

This research is based on a qualitative research design and can be described as an in-depth case study into the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. An in-depth case study is used as this gives the researcher the opportunity to go into more detail and compare the assumptions from the theories with the reality (Odell, 2001).

For this case study, the method of process-tracing is used. Process-tracing differs from most other case study methods by the type of inferences that are made (Beach and Pedersen, 2013, p.4). In process-tracing the researcher wants to go beyond testing the relation between the independent and the dependent variable. According to Beach and Pederson (2013), “process-tracing involves attempts to identify the intervening causal process between independent variable and the outcome of the dependent variable” (ibid., p. 1). Process-tracing methods have three distinct research purposes, theory-testing, theory-building and explaining outcome (ibid., p. 11). Distinction exist among the aim of the researcher to whether a causal mechanism is present in a case, building a theoretical mechanism and crafting an explanation that accounts for a particular outcome (ibid.). In theory-testing process-tracing, the researcher assumes that a causal mechanism can be identified in a specific case. In order to test whether the causal mechanism is present and that it functioned as theorized, the research selects a case where the X and Y are present. The causal mechanism is derived from existing literature. (ibid., p. 14). So, a causal mechanism is identified and needs to be tested in this specific case in order to be able to confirm this mechanism. Theory-building process-tracing involves “building a theory about a causal mechanism between X and Y than can be generalized to a population of a given phenomenon, starting from a situation where the researcher is in the dark regarding the mechanism” (ibid., p. 11).

As described in the previous chapter, this thesis will prove whether the modified theory of Joachim (2007) is able to understand how and under which conditions NGOs are able to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agenda. The study seeks to describe which frames are used in the different framing processes. Whether the frames of the NGOs become accepted and legitimized is dependent on the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures. Therefore, the conceptual model of this research assumes that the following conditions will be identified in the case study: access, allies, political alignments and conflicts in parliament, entrepreneurs, diverse membership and the use of scientific and testimonial knowledge. Since this study builds on the theoretical framework of Joachim (2007) about the role of NGOs in the agenda-setting process, this research can be categorized as theory-testing. The starting point of this study is an existing theory which is applied to and tested in the case of Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. However, this research has adapted the theoretical framework of Joachim to apply the theory to the domestic context. Therefore, this study has added some insights from other theories, as result it can be argued that this study can be categorized as theory-building.

According to Beach and Pedersen (2013), process tracing attempts to make within-case inferences about causal mechanisms in single case studies. These authors argue that it is therefore impossible to compare results from process-tracing with results from other case studies. Bengtsson and Ruonavaara (2017) argue that it is possible to compare multiple cases by applying what they call ‘comparative process tracing’ (ibid., p. 45). The method of process-tracing raises the question to what extent The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots can be seen as a single case or whether the NGOs, the members of the transnational advocacy network, need to be considered as separate cases. The assumption of this research is that the influence of the NGOs on the national agenda cannot be understood as an isolated process. Therefore, this study is a single case study into the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. The transnational advocacy network is the research unit and the national NGOs are the units of observation.

In particular, this case study is a phenomenological case study. The phenomenological case study attempts to describe how the phenomenon is experienced by the participants. The purpose of a phenomenological approach is to understand the issue or topic from the everyday knowledge and perceptions of those involved (Cresswell, 2007, p. 58). In this way, the phenomenological case study can describe what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. This allows the researcher to “reduce individual experiences to a description of the universal essence” (ibid.). For this research, employees of NGOs that are involved in the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots are interviewed about how, why and under what conditions their organisation is able to place the issue of autonomous weapon on the national agenda.

4.2. Data collection

This thesis will collect data from two qualitative data collection methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The choice for the two qualitative data methods is based on the assumption that the triangulation technique gives a more comprehensive and detailed image of the case study.

The main data collection to answer the research question will be derived from interviews with employees from NGOs that are involved in the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. The type of interview will be semi-structure interviews. This means that the researcher sets the outline for the questions that will be asked during the interview³. During the interview, the answers of the interviewee determine how the interview is directed. This gives the researcher the opportunity to respond to the answers and ask follow-up questions (Longhurt, 2003). Afterwards, the interviews have been transcribed, coded and analysed by the software Atlas.ti. The codes correspond to the conditions mentioned in the conceptual framework. For the condition of frames, subcodes are used to distinguish the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames. All the interviews were in English, except from the interviews with the employees of PAX and PAX Christi Flanders. The quotes of these interviews were translated from Dutch to English. Due to geographical limitations and the corona crisis, all the interviews have been conducted by Skype.

Document analysis is “a systematic procedure for evaluating documents” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). In the process of document analysis, the researcher analyses various types of documents in order to construct a comprehensive overview of the information that is available. The researcher may use a variety of documents. For the purpose of this research, two types of documents will be analysed. First of all,

³ In the appendix, an overview of the interviewees, including their positions, is added.

documents written by the NGOs will be examined. Examples are policy-papers and studies about lethal autonomous weapons conducted by the NGOs. Furthermore, messages on the official websites from the NGOs will be studied to describe the perceptions of NGOs. In order to determine to what extent the NGOs were able to place the issue on the national agenda, the following documents will be taken into account: governmental letters, debates in the committees of Defense and Foreign Affairs, parliamentary hearings, resolutions and questions by members of parliament about the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. Only documents since 2012 are taken into consideration, as this thesis argues that the report by Human Rights Watch can be seen as a starting point.

4.3 Case selection

This study is a case study into the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, a global coalition of 164 international, regional and national NGOs in 65 countries (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, n.d.). Due to geographical and time limitations, a selection of NGOs has been made. For the purpose of this research, only NGOs are selected that fit the definition of an NGO as non-state, non-violent, non-profit and non-political. Another requirement is that the organisation is organized in a stable structure and that the organisation is runned by employed staff. Furthermore, this study requires that NGOs are active in a country that can be categorized as a democracy. The theoretical framework illustrated that theories such as the spiral or boomerang cannot describe the influence of NGOs in democratic states. Therefore, this thesis provides an alternative model to explain the influence of NGOs in democratic states, in particular in the agenda-setting phase. The selection of NGOs is therefore limited by controlling for the degree of democracy in a country. The degree of democracy can be measured by the Polity IV index. The Polity IV index ranges from -10 to +10, in which a +10 corresponds to a full democracy (Systemic Peace, n.d.). For this thesis, only NGOs in states with a score of 10+ for the last 10 years are included. This research has been conducted during an internship at PAX, a Dutch NGO who is a steering member of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. The intern organisation has provided the contact details of other NGOs in the transnational advocacy network.

The following seven NGOs participated in the research: Article 36 (United Kingdom), Italian Network for Disarmament (Italy), Facing Finance (Germany), Mines Action (Canada), Norwegian Peace Association (Norway), PAX (Netherlands), Pax Christi Flanders (Belgium). Human Rights Watch in the United States has been approached but unfortunately the employee did not respond on the request for an interview. The organisations meet the requirements of non-violent, non-profit, non-political and are organised in a stable structure with employed staff. The Norwegian Peace Association is the only exception on this last requirement. Until 2017, the organisation had six employees. Nowadays, the NGOs is mainly runned by volunteers and two employees have a part-time position. The NGO is included in the research, as I argue that the organisation can be seen as a professional organisation, considering their long history and expertise. All the NGOs are members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots and thus work on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. A brief description of the NGOs will be given:

Article 36 describes itself as a 'specialist non-profit organisation' (Article 36, 2020). The name article 36 refers to the particular article in the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, which calls for scrutiny of new weapons and methods of warfare. The aim of the organisation is to reduce harms from weapons and promote strong control over the development and use of weapons. The organisation has also been active on issues such as nuclear and explosive weapons and drones. The organisation is

established in 2011 and is based in the United Kingdom. Article 36 is also one of the founding members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. The organisation includes four employees (ibid.).

Italian Disarmament Network (Rete Italiana per Disarmo) is established in 2004. The organisation consists out of 20 national organisations, research institutes and faith based organisations that work on issues related to peace. After a campaign to change a national law about arms export, the coalition of organisations decided to organize is a permanent network (Interviewee, 5, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

Facing Finance is a German non-profit organisation that encourages investors to withdraw financial support from companies involved in human rights abuses, environmental pollution, corruption, and/or production of controversial weapons (Facing, Finance, n.d.). Facing Finance coordinates the German campaign to Stop Killer Robots, in which four other German organisations are involved. At the moment, 12 people work for the organisation (Interviewee 6, personal communication, June 15, 2020).

Mines Action Canada is a disarmament organisation focused on eliminating the serious humanitarian, environmental and development consequences of indiscriminate weapons, including landmines, cluster munitions, other explosive remnants of war, explosive weapons in populated areas and lethal autonomous weapons (Mines Action Canada, n.d.). The organisation was founded in 1994. Mines Action Canada is a coalition of 40 Canadian NGOs. Mines Action Canada is one of the steering members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. The team includes three people.

Norwegian Peace Association (Norges Fredslag) was founded in 1885. The Norwegian Peace Association is working in local and thematic groups on issues like autonomous weapons, non-violent communication and culture, politics of peace and peace education. The Norwegian Peace Association is part of the Norwegian Peace Council, an umbrella organisation of 20 Norwegian NGOs concerned with peace. Until 2017 the organisation had six employees. Nowadays, two employees work part-time and the organisation is led by a board and volunteers (Interviewee 4, personal communication, June 4, 2020).

PAX is a Dutch NGO that wants to contribute to peaceful and just societies. PAX is active in fourteen countries and Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and the South Eastern Europe in order to initiate and support local peace initiatives (PAX, n.d.). PAX works on various issues such as natural resources, gender, security and disarmament. PAX emerged from a partnership between IKV Foundation (founded in 1966) and Pax Christi (founded in 1948). In total, the organisation consists out of 140 people. The disarmament team includes five people and two people are working on lethal autonomous weapons (Interviewee 7, personal communication, June 16, 2020).

PAX Christi Flanders was founded in 1953. The aim of the organisation is to promote peace and security, reconciliation and justice based on human values and Christian inspiration, in its own society and in other parts of the world (PAX Christi, n.d.). The organisation is working on four central themes: security and disarmament, human rights, violence and non-violent alternatives and international relations. The organisation consists out of 13 people, including a policy officer for international security and disarmament.

4.4 Limitations and bias

Qualitative research can be criticised on choices or interpretations that have been made by the researcher. Especially due to time and geographical reasons, this research has some limitations. The

first limitation concerns the selection of the NGOs. Due to limited time for this thesis, it was not possible to speak to all the members of the transnational advocacy campaign. Furthermore, the selection of the NGOs has been limited by the requirement of a certain level of democracy in a country. As there are only a limited number of cases involved, the research “suffers from problems concerning representativeness” (Gerring, 2007, p. 43). The external validity is low. This means that the findings are based on a single case study so it is difficult to generalize the conclusions to a broader context (Bennet, 2004, p. 19). Data from the interviews should therefore be seen as a source of how the participants perceive the national agenda-setting power of NGOs rather than factual and generalizable data (Collingwood & Logister, 2007).

Using the qualitative method of process-tracing brings in the risk of adopting biases. Geddes (1990) is critical on case studies. His main concern is that selecting a case on the dependent variable brings in a bias before the research has even started. Bias can occur in any phase of research, including case selection, data collection and the interpretation of the results. In order to fully describe how participants view the phenomenon, Cresswell (2007) argues that the researcher must be aware of his own background and personal experiences (*ibid.*, p. 62). For example, the background of a researcher might influence how a researcher interprets certain findings from the study. In regard of this, it is necessary to mention that this research has been conducted during an internship at PAX. I have conducted various tasks for the intern organisation and became part of the organisation. I might therefore be biased towards the role of NGOs and the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. This might lead to a confirmation bias, this means that the researcher is only looking for information that confirms the assumptions from the study (George and Bennet, 2005, p. 217). Positive evidence is more striking and therefore, the researcher might ignore information that contradicts with the assumptions. However, I tried to write this research as an independent student and not as an advocate. My supervisors from the intern organisation have provided suggestions for the research, but did not have any interests in this research. Another potential bias is that the intern organisation has provided the contact details from the other NGOs. This brings in a potential bias in this research, as the research only includes NGOs that have a good working relation with PAX.

5. Empirical chapter: the perceptions of NGOs

In the previous chapter, three variables were identified to explain why, how and under which conditions NGOs are able to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agenda. This chapter discusses the findings from the interviews and the document analysis about which frames and conditions from the mobilizing structures and political opportunity structure can be identified in the case study.

5.1 Framing

NGOs can exert influence by strategically framing the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. The influence of the NGOs varies across the different agenda-setting phases. Three agenda-setting phases, diagnostic, prognostic and motivational, can be identified in the case study.

5.1.1 Diagnostic framing

Within the first phase, the diagnostic framing, the NGOs have to identify the problem. The aim of diagnostic framing is that people recognize a condition as unacceptable. In this phase, the NGOs have tried to frame the issue of lethal autonomous weapons as a humanitarian problem, instead of a military or security issue. The concerns from the NGOs about lethal autonomous weapons can be distinguished in three categories: legal, ethical and security concerns. Regardless the category, in all the arguments that the NGOs use, they focus on the potential consequences for civilians. This confirms the assumption from Keck and Sikkink (1998) that “campaigns against practices involving bodily integrity and prevention of bodily harm for vulnerable or innocent groups are most likely to be effective” (ibid., p. 27). An additional advantage of this is frame is that when the frame becomes accepted, it provides more access for NGOs as the issue is no longer seen as an exclusive area for states.

“Killer robots will terrify local populations and, possibly, cause hatred among them. But besides the effects experienced by the population of the attacked state, the use of lethal autonomous weapons could also be counter-productive and endanger civilians of the state using lethal autonomous weapons” (PAX in Ekelhof and Struyk, 2018, p. 23).

“Norway is sometimes seen as a country that has two foreign affairs faces, one of the peace nation and the other one of a country that also makes a lot of weaponry. Therefore, is important to put the issue of autonomous weapons on the humanitarian table, not on the defence table” (Norwegian Peace Association, personal communication, June 4, 2020)

In addition to framing the issue as a humanitarian issue, the Italian Disarmament Network argued that they used the frame of military expenditures. The NGO did this before in the campaign against the F35, a Joint Strike Fighter. By showing how much money is invested in the development of lethal autonomous weapons, the NGO aims to raise public support for a ban. However, according to the interviewee the frame did not succeed. The interviewee argued that there is little public awareness about this issue because Italy is not one of the big financial investors in the development of lethal autonomous weapons.

According to the NGOs, lethal autonomous are a threat for civilians. Carpenter (2005) assumed that it is easier to mobilize support for an issue when the message is framed in terms of protecting women and children. According to PAX, algorithms in lethal autonomous weapons will be able to target specific groups based on data such as gender, age, ethnicity or dress-code (Slijper et al., 2019, p. 9). However, the NGOs do not mention any particular groups within the society that should be protected against

the threat of lethal autonomous weapons. An explanation for this finding would be that the campaign against lethal autonomous weapons is established to create a pre-emptive ban. Lethal autonomous weapons have not claimed any victims and are therefore they are lacking as actors in the campaigns.

5.1.2 Prognostic framing

The second type of framing processes is prognostic framing, “which involves the identification of solutions to a problem” (Joachim, 2007, p. 20). In order to formulate a solution, the NGOs refer to the previous bans on cluster munitions, nuclear weapons, blinding lasers and landmines. A ban would take the form of a legally binding prohibition treaty, either as a protocol to the CCW (like protocol IV on blinding laser weapons) or as a standalone convention (like those on landmines and cluster munitions) (Rosert and Sauer, 2020, p. 3). In particular, the ban on blinding lasers is an effective framing strategy, as blinding laser weapons and lethal autonomous weapons are both regarded as a new technology. The NGO link the new issue of lethal autonomous weapons to pre-existing moral standards about conventional weapons to enhance the credibility of the solution.

Instead of a ban, suggestions have been made for calling for a positive obligation, shifting from a prohibition of lethal autonomous weapons towards a legal framework that requires meaningful control in lethal autonomous weapons (Rosert and Sauer, 2020).

“We first wish to recall that the ICRC is not at this time calling for a ban, nor a moratorium on ‘autonomous weapon systems’. However, we are urging States to consider the fundamental legal and ethical issues raised by autonomy in the ‘critical functions’ of weapon systems before these weapons are further developed or deployed in armed conflicts” (ICRC, 2015).

The strategy of framing the issue of lethal autonomous weapons as a humanitarian problem appeared to be helpful in countering the arguments calling for a positive obligation to ensure meaningful human control. The NGOs recognise the importance of discussing the concept of meaningful human control. However, according to the NGOs, a ban remains the ultimate solution, given the speed of the technological developments in artificial intelligence and the potential consequences for civilians that these weapons may cause. An interviewee stressed that a ban is necessarily, because it is important to act before it is too late.

“It is a long process until we have an international treaty. That does not mean that we cannot do anything. We want Germany to have a moratorium so that no German company can develop these weapons” (Facing Finance, personal communication, June 15, 2020).

5.1.3 Motivational framing

Motivational framing appeared to be the most crucial phase within the agenda-setting process. Motivational framing offers a reason for why people or states should take action. An important aim of a frame within this process is to invoke feelings of fear. An effective strategy to raise fear is by shaping the language that is used. The NGOs use the term ‘Killer Robots’, instead of the more neutral term of lethal autonomous weapons or fully autonomous weapons. The term invokes feelings of fears and causes a negative public image. The term resonates with the media as news items are often accompanied by images from the Terminator, a film in which a robot is disguised as a human. Another way to raise fears is to refer to doomsday scenarios. The NGOs describe what happens if action is not taken.

“These systems would at some point also fight each other, and with the wide variety of unknown algorithms the consequences would be unpredictable and most likely devastating. This would result in an overall threat to society not only from state governments but also from non-state actors such as insurgents and terrorist organisations. Unfortunately, the proliferation of weapons is an extremely difficult cycle to break. Therefore, PAX believes lethal autonomous weapons should never be developed in the first place and a comprehensive and pre-emptive ban should be put in place before it is too late” (PAX in Ekelhof and Struyk, 2014, p. 26).

The frame of fear can be used to raise attention from the general public about lethal autonomous weapons. Public attention for lethal autonomous weapons can also be used as an additional argument to place the issue on the political agenda. Princen (2009) made a distinction between types of agenda in democracies: the media, the public and the political agenda. The empirical analysis reveals that these agendas cannot be seen as isolated processes. NGOs strategically use the interconnectedness between the media, public and political agenda. PAX Christi Flanders referred to the international survey that has been conducted. Research institute Ipsos, on behalf of Human Rights Watch for the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, conducted an online survey. According to this survey, sixty one percent of adults across 26 countries say that these oppose the use of lethal autonomous weapons systems (Deeney, 2019). In a similar study conducted by Ipsos in January 2017, 56% opposed. The survey also provided percentages for the independent 26 countries included. For example, the survey said that 63% of the Belgium population ‘somewhat or strongly oppose’ with the use of lethal autonomous weapons. By using the frame of the public support for a ban autonomous weapons, the NGOs are trying to place the issue on the political agenda by showing that it is already an issue on the public agenda.

“Having a survey that shows that a strong majority of voters of each political party wanted the Belgian government to support a prohibition, was a real game changer” (PAX Christi Flanders, personal communication, May 26, 2020).

The campaign to Stop Killer Robots is embedded in a long history of disarmament activism. NGOs use the previous campaigns against other conventional weapons such as landmines, cluster munitions and blinding lasers contribute to mobilizing people to take action in multiple ways. The reference to former campaigns shows that the damage that weapons such as landmines and cluster munitions have caused can be prevented. Additionally, the frame of reputational concerns is used. The Norwegian Peace Association referred to the campaign against cluster munitions, as Norway was the one initiating the cluster munition process. The NGO emphasizes that Norway has taken a leading position before and can do it again with the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. Mines Action Canada frequently referred to the Ottawa Treaty, in which Canada took leadership to install a ban on landmines. This is also emphasized in the scientist letter that was coordinated by Mines Action Canada.

“We often talk about, what will happen when we let problematic weapons be used and then we end up having to clean up the mess. So we are trying to avoid the crisis that we faced with landmines and cluster munitions, by pre-emptively banning autonomous weapons” (Mines Action Canada, personal communication, May 26, 2020).

“Our government can reclaim its position of moral leadership on the world stage as demonstrated previously by the Ottawa Treaty—the international ban on landmines initiated in 1996

by our then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, who was originally appointed to the federal Cabinet by your father” - Open scientists letter, coordinated by Mines Action Canada (Techlaw, 2017).

Another frame that is used by NGOs is the message that states can enhance their reputation by showing leadership on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. In this frame, the NGOs often refer to role that states have played in previous campaigns against conventional weapons. In July 2018, the Belgian parliament adopted a resolution that “calls the government to forbid the Belgian military from using lethal autonomous weapons and to work toward an international treaty banning the weapons” (PAX, 2018). In the explanation of the resolution, the members of parliament referred to the leading role of Belgium on landmines and cluster munitions. This frame was created by PAX Christi Flanders and was adopted by the members of parliament.

“Belgium does not have to wait for other countries but can play a leading role. In the past, Belgium took leadership in this area. In 1996 and 2006, Belgium was the first country to introduce a national ban on landmines and cluster munitions” Resolution 3203/001, submitted by MPs Buysrogge, Miller, Yuksel, Vandenput, Grosemans, Bellens (De Kamer.BE, 2018).

5.2 Political opportunity structure

5.2.1 Access

Access is the first condition of the political opportunity structure. The interviewees mentioned various ways to obtain access to parliamentarians, political parties, civil servants and diplomats. In contrast to the international institutions, where NGOs can obtain consultative status, NGOs must use more indirect strategies to get access to national institutions. For example, the NGOs hold informal relationships with members of parliament. The interviewees mentioned that they have good working relations with almost all political parties in parliament. A few exceptions were mentioned: Facing Finance does not engage with the right-wing populist *Alternative Für Deutschland* and Mines Action Canada mentioned that they do not work together with the *Bloc Québécois*, because of the French language. According to Article 36, the issue of lethal autonomous weapons is cross-party. The NGO argued that it possible to engage both conservative parties as more progressive parties on the issue. In contrast, Facing Finance mentioned specific parties and referred to the Green Party and the Left Party as ‘partners’.

“The Greens and the Left Party are our partners, who we can approach If we want to know something, or bring something into parliament” (Facing Finance, personal communication, June 15, 2020).

A more formal strategy to get access is attending a parliamentary hearing or a roundtable. Parliamentary committees frequently hold hearings and round-table talks in which experts or stakeholders are invited to comment on a particular issue. The committee members can for example use the input from hearings and round-table talks when they take new legislation into consideration. In 2019, the Dutch parliamentary committee for Defense organised a roundtable about drones and autonomous weapons. At the meeting, various actors, including PAX, told their perspective on lethal autonomous weapons. PAX also made a statement at the Belgium parliamentary hearing on lethal autonomous weapons in december 2017. Research conducted by government provide another possibility for NGOs to gain access. In April 2015, the Dutch Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence asked the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) and the Advisory Committee on Issues of Public International Law (CAVV) to produce an advisory report on autonomous weapon systems. To

produce this advisory report, the AIV/CAVV talked with various stakeholders, including PAX. The extent to which NGOs are able to seek access, is also dependent on the size of the organisation. PAX is a relatively large organisation, where two fulltime employees work on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. On the contrary, the funding for the Norwegian Peace Association was reduced in 2017 and now the organisation is mainly runned by volunteers in working groups and only two employees work part-time for the organisation.

“We are able to get in contact with parliamentarians, we are able to have meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the presidents of the committees, So, you cannot ignore us” (Italian Disarmament Network, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

In order to keep informal relations with members of parliament or to be invited for a parliamentary hearing, NGOs have to be seen as legitimate actors. One of the explanations for legitimacy according to Chapman and Fisher (2000) is working in alliances and networks. In this way, NGOs gain legitimacy from other members of the network. The NGOs are part of the transnational advocacy network, but also at the national level do the NGOs work in alliances and networks. According to the interviewee, part of the legitimacy of the Norwegian Peace Association is that they work together with bigger and more solid organisations, such as Amnesty Norway and Norwegian Peoples Aid. According to Facing Finance, working in alliances provides the NGOs the opportunity to focus on particular aspect of the issue. In Germany, there are for instance two NGOs that especially formulated a gender perspective on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. Another explanation for legitimacy according to Chapman and Fisher (2000) is that an NGO is seen as an expert on a particular issue. PAX argued that the organisation is seen as an expert on lethal autonomous weapons because it is the only organisation in the Netherlands that is working on the issue. This finding contradicts with the assumption that NGOs derive legitimacy from working in alliances.

“In contrast to nuclear weapons, it is easier to be seen as an expert on the issue of autonomous weapons. People see PAX as an organisation with a certain political belief, as an activist organisation that is always protesting against nuclear weapons. In the case of autonomous weapons, there is less competition about who is seen as an expert as we are the only organisation working on this issue” (PAX, personal communication, June 16, 2020).

Furthermore, history has been mentioned as a reason for why NGOs are seen as legitimate actors. The Norwegian Peace Association emphasized that it is the oldest peace organisation of Norway, as the NGO was founded in 1885. According to the interviewee, this gives the organisation a good reputation. Other interviewees argued that because of the history of the organisation, they are seen as trustable partners.

“We have been doing this for 25 years. We come with information, solid research and spend a lot of time of building relationships. We have a track record of being on the right side of history” (Mines Action Canada, personal communication, May 26, 2020).

“Because time by time, year by year, we have been recognized as a trustable source or at least as an organisation to which you can engage in a debate, because they recognize our knowledge and our expertise on a lot of issues” (Italian Disarmament Network, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

5.2.2 Allies

The second condition of the political opportunity structure are influential allies. Allies can amplify and legitimize the frames of NGOs because they have resources that NGOs themselves lack. The NGOs identified four types of allies: scientists, technology companies, religious organisations and well-known public figures.

The most frequently mentioned allies are scientists. All the interviewees emphasized the important role of scientists in the debate about lethal autonomous weapons. First of all, scientists have played a role in raising the issue pre-emptively and reaching out to humanitarian organisations. Furthermore, NGOs work together with scientists to create awareness. In 2015, the Future of Life Institute released an open letter, calling for a ban on offensive weapons beyond human control, which has been signed by thousand artificial intelligence and robotic researchers and other leading figures, such as Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk. Besides this international scientist letter, NGOs, such as Facing Finance, Mines Action Canada and Pax Christi Flanders have published letters signed by national scientists. According to the Campaign Toolkit from the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, a scientist letter works best if it can be related to the local context. The advice is therefore to launch the letter a few days before the a debate in the parliament is held (Hunt, 2019). In Belgium, the scientist letter was launched a few day before a hearing in the Belgium Federal parliament.

“As members of the Belgian artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics research community, we express our deep concern about the development of fully autonomous weapon systems, which lack meaningful human control over the critical functions of targeting and engagement in every attack” Belgium scientist letter (Belpaeme, 2017).

A scientist’s letter is also a good opportunity to raise public awareness. The Canadian letter received for example significant media attention. Besides these letters, the NGOs have made partnerships with research institutes and academic institutions. For example, Article 36 has a partnership with the University of Liverpool, Harvard Law School and the University of Exeter. Working together with scientists gives the NGOs a kind of legitimacy. The interviews show that the support from the scientists create new opportunities, for example in accessing the media. Scientists are seen as objective and neutral actors within this process.

“It is really good to have experts on our side. Because of their role, they can write articles for some newspapers that usually do not accept articles by activists. But given the fact they are for example a professor at the University of Napels, it is different” (Italian Disarmament Network, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

The analysis shows that the condition of allies is connected to the condition of access. This becomes clear in the interview with Mines Action Canada. In 2018, the Canadian government formed an artificial intelligence advisory committee. The chair of the committee was Yoshua Bengio, a professor at the Department of Computer Science and Operations Research at the University of Montreal. Together with Geoffrey Hinton and Yann LeCun, computer scientists and professors, they are often referred as the ‘Godfathers of artificial intelligence’ (Vincent, 2019). Yoshua Bengio can be considered as an ally as he strongly supports a ban against autonomous weapons. When they won the Turing Prize, a prize for contributions of major technical important to the computer field, almost all the media attention was focused on their position on lethal autonomous weapons.

Another important factor is the support of technology companies that are involved in artificial intelligence. Mines Action got the support of Clearpath Robotics, a robotic firm that provides self-driving vehicle technology. Clearpath Robotics was the first company that stated that they would not contribute to the development of the lethal autonomous weapons. The Chief Technical Officer of Clearpath Robotics joined Mines Action Canada in meetings with parliamentarians and at the UN. According to Mines Action Canada, this was useful as the chief technical officer was able to give an industry perspective on the issue. In Germany, support came from the German Industry Association, which already published a policy paper in March 2013. Although Facing Finance was in contact with the German Industry Association, the policy paper was an independent initiative.

Furthermore, some NGOs mentioned specific individuals as allies. Celebrities are not directly involved within the campaigns, but well-known public figures have endorsed the campaign. For example, Facing Finance mentioned the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is a Social Democrat and this party is more in favour of creating a national moratorium to prohibit lethal autonomous weapons. However, because of the coalition agreement with the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats cannot take concrete actions on the issue.

“He keeps mentioning to the media, on his website, in speeches and international fora, that Germany wants to prohibit killer robots” (Facing Finance, personal communication, June 15, 2020).

The Italian Disarmament Network also mentioned Jody Williams as an ally, an activist known for her work on banning landmines, for which she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997. In 2013, Jody Williams met with the Italy’s foreign minister to discuss lethal autonomous weapons.

“We had the occasion to have Jody William for a couple of times. The first one was for a big peace conference and I asked Jody to come. It was the first time we were able to put the issue in the media” (Italian Disarmament Network, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

Two interviewees mentioned the role of the church in the campaign. The Interfaith Council of the Norwegian Church has also claimed that the Norwegian government has to take a leadership role international to create a preventive ban (News Bureau NTB, 2020). In particular in Italy, the position of the Vatican in regard to lethal autonomous weapons is an important aspect. Besides Belgium, the Vatican is one of the few European parties to the CCW that is calling for a ban.

“In a country like Italy, the moral argument is really important. And in this aspect, we use the good position of the Vatican on Killer Robots. It is the only way we can reach a broader public” (Italian Disarmament Network, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

5.2.3 Political alignments and conflict

In addition to access and influential allies, elections and conflicts between political parties can provide opportunities for NGOs. According to Mines Action Canada, elections have played an important role in the agenda-setting process. When the Trudeau government came into power, the issue of lethal autonomous weapons was given more attention than before. The mandate letter for the Minister of Foreign Affairs included instructions to advance international efforts to ban the development and use of fully autonomous weapons systems.

Elections provide NGOs an opportunity to put the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the agenda of political parties. Ahead of Norway’s general elections in September 2017, the Norway Peace Association created a survey for political parties to ask to what extent the parties had policies on

autonomous weapons. In the campaigns for the elections, some parties had included the issues of lethal autonomous weapons in the party programmes. The Green Party for instance stated its support for a ban, pledging to “work for international regulations against autonomous robot-controlled weapons systems.” The Christian Democratic Party program committed to “work for international transparency around testing and development of fully autonomous weapons” but did not address the call for a ban on the weapons (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, 2017). Also Facing Finance mentioned that they see the upcoming German elections in 2021 as an opportunity. The interviewee mentioned that the NGO has established good partnerships with the Green party and the Left Part and that they are confident that the campaign’s view on autonomous weapons will be reflected in the respective party programmes.

Various participants indicated that changes in parliament had a negative effect on the campaign. In the Italian campaign, the NGO had good informal contacts with a specific member of parliament. This politician was really interested in the issue of lethal autonomous weapons and shared the concerns of the NGOs. However, this member of parliament was not re-elected during the elections. PAX mentioned that the institutional memory of political parties is limited. Therefore, PAX has to explain their concerns again after every election and with every new issue. On the other side, Facing Finance argued that working together with the employees of the party is beneficial. In contrast to the members of parliament, these people work for a longer period for the party.

“MPs come and go, but the people working for the party, they stay. With the greens, there is one lady who is working for the party for ten years, so she witnessed the past campaigns. The time that we started to work on the campaign, she was automatically interested in hearing what we have to say” (Facing Finance, personal communication, June 15, 2020).

5.3 Mobilizing structures

5.3.1 Entrepreneurs

The first condition of the mobilizing structures are entrepreneurs. From the interviews, two entrepreneurs are identified.

Scientists have already been mentioned as influential allies within the campaign. Due to the image as objective and neutral, scientists have played a pivotal role. Besides this role, scientists have functioned as entrepreneurs. The concerns about lethal autonomous weapons were first voiced by Noel Sharkey, a professor of artificial intelligence and robotics at the University of Sheffield. Already in 2007, Sharkey wrote an article in the Guardian to warn for the development of ‘autonomous robots’. In 2009, the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (ICRAC) was established by experts in robotics technology, artificial intelligence and robot ethics because of their concerns about the dangers that military robots pose to peace and international security.

“Scientists have played an important role in raising the issue pre-emptively and the fact that the whole campaign was first brought to live by scientists reaching out to humanitarian organisations” (Norwegian Peace Association, personal communication, June 4, 2020)

The second entrepreneur is the steering committee of the campaign and in particular Human Rights Watch. The Norwegian Peace Association mentioned that the Human Rights Watch report about lethal autonomous weapons was the starting point for the campaign. In 2012, Human Rights Watch published the report ‘Losing Humanity, the case against Killer Robots’. In this report, Human Rights

Watch recommends states to “prohibit the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons through an internationally legally binding instrument and to adopt national laws and policies to prohibit the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons” (Human Rights Watch, 2012). In 2012, at an international conference about landmines in New York, 40 NGOs committed to take action against lethal autonomous weapons (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, n.d.). This was an initiative from Mary Wareham, the arms advocacy director from Human Rights Watch. Within the Coalition to Stop the Killer Robots, ten NGOs form the steering committee, including Human Rights Watch, PAX, Article 36, ICRC and Mines Action Canada. A year later in 2013, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots was officially launched in London (ibid.). The power of these NGOs relies in the fact that they have been involved in the previous campaigns. It is not only the same organisations that are involved in a new campaign, it is also the same advocate that is involved again. The embeddedness in a long history of arms activism gives NGOs the opportunity to use already available communication mechanisms such as mailing lists and it gives NGOs the ability to predict which frames will be effective.

“It is the same group of people engaged in a new issue, at least from the humanitarian point of view” (Article 36, personal communication, May 26, 2020).

5.3.2. Diverse membership

The second condition of the mobilizing structures is diverse membership, which means that an NGO has members from diverse cultural and political background or that an NGO claims that they represent people from diverse cultural and political backgrounds.

The internal structures of the organisations that are included vary. A few organisations, such as Mines Action Canada and the Italian Disarmament Network are umbrella organisations. NGOs such as PAX and Article 36 do not have a membership structure. The absence of a membership structure is often criticised because of a lack of representation. Unlike democratic states, NGOs do not have an electoral mandate and it is not always clear who they represent. This is in particular relevant when the funding of the organisations is taken into account. Article 36 is for instance funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. PAX is heavily dependent on the funding from the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, PAX did not share the assumption that a membership structure would enhance the legitimacy of the frames. According to PAX, the legitimacy of the organisation is derived from the fact that PAX is the only organisation working on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. PAX also mentioned another way to show that PAX represents the general public opinion. In 2016, PAX collected more than 45.000 signatories for a citizens’ initiative to hold a debate about a national legislation on nuclear weapons. Besides signatories, PAX has collected their contact details. The people signing the citizens’ initiative to ban nuclear weapons will also be interested in the broad theme of humanitarian disarmament and security. This gives PAX the chance to mobilize these people on new themes, such as lethal autonomous weapons. It gives PAX the ability to claim that they represent a part of the society, but they cannot claim anything about the background from these people. Article 36 argued that in absence of a membership structure, the legitimacy is obtained from partnerships from previous campaign.

“Of course, we represent our members, but at the same time, we also represent the common interest that we need to prevent conflict” (Pax Flanders, personal communication, May 19, 2020).

“I guess our legitimacy and our ability to act is from our previous partnerships and the reputation that we have, rather than any sort of broader support or reputation among the public.

Because otherwise we are quite random. It is a small organisation in the United Kingdom, we have very few people. We do not have a membership structure, it is just the four of us” (Article 36, personal communication, May 26, 2020).

A surprising outcome of this study is that the interviewees said that there was almost no debate within the organisations. Taking up the issue of lethal autonomous weapons and joining the international campaign has not been debated extensively within the organisations. Two interviewees said that there was no debate because lethal autonomous weapons fit within the category of inhumane and indiscriminate weapons. According to another interviewee, disarmament has been the foundation of the organisation, and therefore it is not something that needed to be discussed.

“I was not at the meeting in New York when it first came up. But when my colleague came back, he said that it was good meeting. And he said: ‘Oh by the way, we decided to found a new campaign on killer robots, so we better build a website” (Mines Action Canada, personal communication, May 26, 2020).

“There has not been any kind of controversy or resistance about autonomous weapons within the organisation. Everybody feels that this is an important issue” (Italian Disarmament Network, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

5.3.3 Scientific and testimonial knowledge

The last condition of the political opportunity structure is the condition of expertise. Joachim (2007) claims that different types of knowledge are required to create effective frames in the agenda-setting process. Therefore, Joachim makes a distinction between scientific and testimonial knowledge. The case of lethal autonomous weapons reveals a puzzling outcome. According to Joachim, testimonial knowledge appears to be most important element. As described in the second chapter, there is no consensus about the existence of lethal autonomous weapons. Therefore, there is no evidence of the damage these weapons may cause and it is harder to emotionalize this issue by using victim stories or pictures. The interviewees argued that it is harder to mobilize support for the ban against lethal autonomous weapons, as people find it harder to be touched on the issue. The issue is seen as a very technical and specific issue.

“Local groups prefer to work on other issues, like small arms, arms export, military expenditure. It is difficult to get parliamentarians being engaged in this, because they feel that it is so far away, not involving Italy” (Italian Disarmament Network, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

“People find it harder to be touched by the issue as it a very technical issue, it feels so far away” (PAX, personal communication, June 16, 2020).

In an attempt to emotionalize the issue of lethal autonomous weapons, the NGOs have tried to invoke feelings of fear. For example, PAX has made a video in which the key message is that killer robots not only appear in science fiction movies, but are being developed at the moment. Another example is the movie *Slaughterbots*, a video made by Russel, a professor in computer science. This video depicts a future in which lethal autonomous weapons have become cheap and omnipresent. In the video, drones equipped with facial recognition technology kill political opponents. With this video, the professor wanted to provide an alternative image for the unrealistic image of the Terminator as a symbol for lethal autonomous weapons. The professor made the video as he fears that “we, scientists,

were failing to communicate our perceptions on the risks of lethal autonomous weapons to the general public and the media and to the people in power who make decisions” (Crowder, 2017).

In the absence of testimonial knowledge, scientific knowledge has become an essential element. Scientific knowledge is regarded as a credible and reliable source and it is presumed to be objective and neutral. Scientific knowledge proves the existence of the problem that is identified by the NGOs. The empirical analysis already identified the important role of scientists as allies and entrepreneurs. This confirms the relation between these conditions.

5.4 Theoretical implications

The findings from this study might have some implications for academic literature about transnational advocacy networks and the role of NGOs in these networks. NGOs play prominent roles in the transnational advocacy networks, but academic research did barely examine the domestic role of the members of the transnational advocacy networks. This study confirms the assumption that NGOs can simultaneously function as domestic and international actors. This thesis shows that NGOs act as international actors as they are members of a transnational advocacy network. Meanwhile, NGOs act as domestic actors as they aim to influence the state’s interest at the national level by placing an issue on the national agenda. Placing an issue on the national agenda can also contribute to the efforts of the international campaign to place the issue on the agenda of the UN. This study suggests that the national agenda-setting power of NGOs needs to be re-examined. In particular, the agenda-setting power of NGOs in the area of arms control has to be reconsidered. Traditionally, security issues such as arms control were regarded as an exclusive area for states, and not as an arena where NGOs are able to determine which issue receive attention (O’Dwyer, 2006, p. 84). By transforming the debate to a humanitarian problem, NGOs have claimed a role in the debate about lethal autonomous weapons.

In particular this study has some implications for the conceptual framework of this study, that is based on the theoretical framework of Joachim. This study broadens the scope of theoretical model of Joachim, as it focuses on another government institution. This study has underlined the importance of framing processes. This study confirms the assumption that NGO use frames that have been effective in former humanitarian disarmament campaigns, such as the campaign against landmines and cluster munitions. This thesis has identified the conditions of access, allies, political alignments and conflicts and entrepreneurs. The presence of these conditions has enhanced the legitimacy and credibility of the frames.. Furthermore, this thesis assumed a relation between the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures. The findings from this study shows that there exists a relation between the condition of influential allies and entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs such as scientists in parliamentary advisory committees, can for example provide access to NGOs. These findings confirm the explanatory power of the theoretical model of this study.

In the case of the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots, some conditions mentioned in the theoretical framework could not be identified. First, the condition of diverse membership did not play an important role in this study. According to the theory, diverse membership can enhance the legitimacy of the frames as it shows that the NGO represent not only the interest of a specific group in the society. This study shows that NGOs derive legitimacy from other sources than diverse membership. For this case study, the condition of diverse membership could be omitted from the model. According to the NGOs, legitimacy is derived from working in alliances and functioning as an expert. Furthermore, NGOs are seen as trustable actors because of the embeddedness of their actions in a long tradition of arms activism.

The third condition of the mobilizing structures is the expertise of NGOs. In this condition, Joachim distinguish two forms of expertise, scientific and testimonial knowledge. Using testimonial knowledge is a powerful strategy as the stories of victims can be shocking and assign blame. On the other side, victim stories can be questioned as they are not verifiable. Therefore, Joachim argues that NGOs often combine the strategy of scientific knowledge and testimonial knowledge as scientific knowledge is seen as a credible and reliable source and is presumed to be objective. The case of lethal autonomous weapons reveals a puzzling outcome regarding the condition of testimonial knowledge. In previous campaigns, this has been a crucial condition but in this campaign, victims are lacking as an actor. The absence of testimonial knowledge also explains why NGOs did not mention any particular group within the society, such as women and children, that should be protected against the threat of lethal autonomous weapons. This study refutes the assumption that is necessary to combine the strategy of scientific and testimonial knowledge. Therefore, this study suggests that the conditions of testimonial and scientific knowledge have to be seen as two separate conditions.

6. Conclusion: explaining national agenda-setting power

This chapter gives a summary of the findings and describes how these findings should be interpreted in regard to the main and sub-questions. Lastly, this section will mention limitations of this study and will propose some suggestions for further research and practice.

6.1 Findings

This study has tried to explain how, why and under which conditions the members of a transnational advocacy network are able to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons at the national agenda. In order to answer this question, four sub-questions were formulated. The first sub-question deals with the question what lethal autonomous weapons are and how the debates about lethal weapons can be explained. Lethal autonomous weapons are often defined as “weapons that are capable of selecting and attacking targets without human intervention” (Ekelhof, 2017, p. 322). However, there is no consensus about what this actually means in practice. According to the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, lethal autonomous weapons are the third revolution in warfare and will fundamentally change how wars are fought. The transnational advocacy network fears for the legal, ethical and security consequences of the development, production and use of lethal autonomous weapons. On the other side, proponents argue that emerging technologies such as the use of artificial intelligence in weapons, could make warfare more precise and reduce casualties. This has resulted in a heated debate about the definition, existence and regulation of lethal autonomous weapons.

In the second sub-question, attention has been paid to the members of the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots and why they want to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the national agenda. The members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots are 164 international, regional and national NGOs in 65 countries. For this thesis, seven national NGOs in democratic states have been selected. All the NGOs are organisations that are non-violent, non-profit, non-political and are organised in a stable structure with employed staff. Most of the NGOs have been involved in previous disarmament campaigns. The members of the Campaign to Stop the Killer want to place the issue of lethal autonomous weapons as they strive for a national moratorium on the development, production and use of lethal autonomous weapons. Agenda-setting is powerful strategy as it provides NGOs the opportunity to determine which issues receive attention and which issues are taken up for decision-making.

The third sub-question about how the agenda-setting power of the members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots can be explained can be answered with the concept of framing. According to Joachim (2007), NGOs are able to raise attention for an issue by strategically framing it. This study has described the three framing processes. In the diagnostic framing process, this study shows NGOs were able to identify the problem by framing lethal autonomous weapons as a humanitarian issue, instead of a military or security issue. The NGOs focused on the potential consequences for civilians that these weapons may cause. The strategy of framing the issue of lethal autonomous weapons as a humanitarian problem appeared to be helpful in countering the arguments calling for a positive obligation to ensure meaningful human control. In the prognostic framing process, the NGOs argued that the ultimate solution for the problem is an international treaty and a national moratorium on the development, production and use of lethal autonomous weapons. In order to motivate people to take action, NGOs have tried to raise feelings of fears in the motivational framing process. A crucial element in this frame, is the use of the term ‘Killer Robots’. Additionally, by using the frame of public support for a ban lethal autonomous weapons, the NGOs are trying to place the issue on the political agenda

by showing that it is already an issue on the public agenda. Furthermore, NGOs argue that states can enhance their reputation by showing leadership on the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. In this frame, the NGOs refer to previous campaigns against conventional weapons.

Although framing processes are important, they are not sufficient to explain why NGOs are able to place the issue of the national level. The conditions of the political opportunity structure and the mobilizing structures have to be present to explain the national-agenda-setting power of NGOs. This gives an answer to the fourth sub-question. The first condition of the political opportunity structure is the condition of access. The study assumed that NGOs gain access if they are seen as legitimate actors. According to the NGOs, legitimacy is derived from working in alliances and functioning as an expert. Furthermore, NGOs are seen as trustable actors because of their actions in the past. This study has identified four allies: entrepreneurs, technological companies, religious organisations and well-known public figures. These allies have legitimized the frames as they were seen as objective and neutral actors or as moral actors. The allies also provided access opportunities for the NGOs, for example by including NGOs as stakeholders in governmental advisory reports and parliamentary hearings. Perceptions about the condition of political alignments and conflicts in parliament were diverse. Some NGOs argued that elections created opportunities for NGOs while others argued that it could also have a negative effect. Considering the first condition of the mobilizing structures, the study identified two entrepreneurs: scientists and the steering committee of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, in particular Human Rights Watch. The condition of diverse membership is not identified in this case study. It is surprising that the issue was so easily adopted by the organisations. The case of lethal autonomous weapons reveals a puzzling outcome regarding the condition of testimonial knowledge. In previous campaigns, this has been a crucial condition but in this campaign, victims are lacking as an actor. In the absence of testimonial knowledge, scientific knowledge has become an important condition.

Only the conditions of diverse membership and testimonial knowledge have not been identified in this study. This study confirms the explanatory power of the theoretical model of Joachim and broadens the scope of this theory. In particular, this study argues that two elements were crucial in the agenda-setting process. First, the role of scientists as entrepreneurs and allies. Scientists are seen as objective and neutral. The support from scientists has provided opportunities for access and improved the legitimacy of the NGOs. In addition, the embeddedness of the campaign in a long history of disarmament activism has been pivotal. It provides opportunities for access and enhances the credibility of the frames of the NGOs. Furthermore, it gives NGOs the ability to predict which frames will become effective. In general, this study confirms the assumption that NGOs can simultaneously function as domestic and international actors. NGOs have claimed a role in the debate about lethal autonomous weapons. In this way, NGOs have a crucial role in decisions about the future of warfare.

6.2 Reflection

A few limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings from this study. The first limitation is the relatively small number of interviews that have been conducted. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots consists out of 164 members. It was not possible to speak to all the members of the transnational advocacy network. For the purpose of this research, an additional requirement was formulated. Only NGOs that are active in a democracy were taken into consideration for selection. A selection of seven NGOs has been made for this study. The findings from this study are therefore not representative for all the members of the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots. In

order to improve the external validity, the thesis could have selected more NGOs. To improve the internal validity of this thesis, it would have been better to interview more employees from the same NGOs.

For this study seven NGOs were selected that are active in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom. This selection shows that this study has adopted a Western bias. Afterwards, including NGOs that are not located in the Western world would have made this a more inclusive study. NGOs such as the Association for Aid and Relief Japan, Control Arms Foundation India, Women's International League for peace and freedom Ghana could have been approached to participate in the research. According to the Polity IV Index, these countries have a score of +10 for the last ten years and meet the other requirements of this study.

The intern organisation advised to approach the Norwegian Peace Association. The interview with the Norwegian Peace Association provided useful insights. However, the organisation is mainly runned by volunteers. The organisation therefore does not completely meet the requirements of an NGO that was formulated for this study. Afterwards, for the generalizability of this study it would have been better to include another Norwegian NGO, such as the Norwegian Peace Council, Amnesty Norway or the Norwegian Peoples Aid. These NGOs are involved in the Norwegian campaign against lethal autonomous weapons and are runned by employed staff instead of volunteers. Various interviewees have pointed to the important role of Human Rights Watch in the international campaign. This NGO has been approached to participate in this research but unfortunately the NGO did not respond on the request for an interview.

Another limitation related to the data collection is that sometimes original documents, such as parliamentary debates or written questions from members of parliament, were not available. Therefore, this study could not give a comprehensive overview of the dependent variable, the national agenda. Furthermore, a limitation from this research is that some interviewees were not first-hand participants in the agenda-setting process. Some interviewees just recently started working for the organisation. Therefore, these interviewees could not give answers to some questions. For instance, questions about how the issue of lethal autonomous weapons became adopted by the organisation were difficult to answer. However, when this was the case, the interviewees asked for the information within the organisation and send it afterwards.

6.3 Recommendations for further research

This research has provided new insights but some questions remain unanswered. Therefore, this thesis proposes some ideas for further research. Further research could be useful to study the generalizability of this study. It might be interesting to apply the theoretical framework to other transnational advocacy networks, such as the campaign to ban landmines. The explanatory power of the theoretical framework can also be applied to transnational advocacy networks dealing with other issues than humanitarian disarmament, such as the campaign to stop the use of child soldiers. Furthermore, another suggestion would be to study agenda-setting at the European Union. In September 2018, the European Parliament adopted a resolution that calls the members states and the European Council "to work towards international negotiations on a legally binding instrument prohibiting lethal autonomous weapon systems and to come to a common position on lethal autonomous weapons that ensures meaningful human control over the critical functions" (European Parliament, 2018). Although this is a non-binding resolution, it shows that attention is given to the issue of lethal autonomous weapons. A recommendation for further research would be to broaden the scope of this study and to apply the

theory of Joachim to the EU agenda. In this way, the study could examine to what extent the findings from this research about the agenda-setting power of NGOs are generalizable to other government institutions. Furthermore, a recommendation for further research concerns the dependent variable. This study has focussed on the political agenda. Princen (2007) made a distinction between the public, media and political agenda. This study described the interconnectedness between the public and the political agenda. Another recommendation therefore would be to study the influence of the media attention to the issue of lethal autonomous weapons on the political agenda. This could provide insights for NGOs how the media can become an ally in the process of agenda-setting.

Another suggestion for further research is focus on the agenda-setting power of the members of the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots that are active in undemocratic countries. The boomerang model developed by Keck and Sikkink (1998) and the spiral model by Risse, Ropp and Sikkink (1999) describe how NGOs use their network to have an influence on the domestic state. It would be interesting to apply these theories to the case of the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots. In particular, further studies could focus on the Afghan Landmines Survivors' Organisation, the Organisation Against Weapons of Mass Destruction in Kurdistan or the Peace Institute of Cambodia, all members of the Campaign to Stop the Killer Robots.

A recommendation for further research would be to focus on a specific condition of the theoretical model, such as political alignments and conflicts. For the condition of political alignments and conflicts, it would be interesting to examine the role of elections in the agenda-setting process. In the Netherlands and Germany, national elections will be held next years, which provides an opportunity for further research.

6.4 Recommendations for practice

Besides the recommendations for further research, this study has also provided useful information for the members of transnational advocacy networks to improve their campaign and become more successful. A recommendation for NGOs would be to rethink the structure of the organisation. According to the theory of Joachim, heterogeneous constituency or diverse membership could enhance the framing efforts of NGOs. This study described that some NGOs do not have a membership structure. There has not been much debate about the issue of lethal autonomous weapons in the organisations. Diverse membership gives NGOs the possibility to claim that they represent a diverse group in the society. If a democratic membership structure is not possible, an advice would be to organise public debates or opinion polls to hear the opinions from civilians about the issue.

Another finding from this study is the important role that scientists have played as entrepreneurs and allies. An advice for the NGOs would be to strengthen the relationships with scientists. Especially because some NGOs indicated that they were thinking about creating a scientist letter in which scientists call the national government for a ban. Another finding that can be used by the NGOs is that the importance of the embeddedness of the campaign in the previous campaigns. In their advocacy activities, NGOs can emphasize the connection between the campaigns to mobilize support for the new campaign. An advice would be to often make a comparison with blinding laser weapons, as they are both perceived as a new technology but blinding lasers are an example of a weapon that was pre-emptively banned.

This study confirms the assumption that NGO use frames that have been effective in former humanitarian disarmament campaigns, such as the campaign against landmines and cluster munitions.

This could be a valuable insight for advocacy groups that aim to establish a new transnational advocacy network. PAX already referred for example to cyber as a new method of warfare (PAX, personal communication, June 16, 2020). In addition, transnational advocacy networks that have not been able to place the issue on the agenda, such as the campaign against acoustic weapons or small arms can use the insights from this study to create effective frames.

7. References

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